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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

DECEMBER 40¢

EVERGREEN

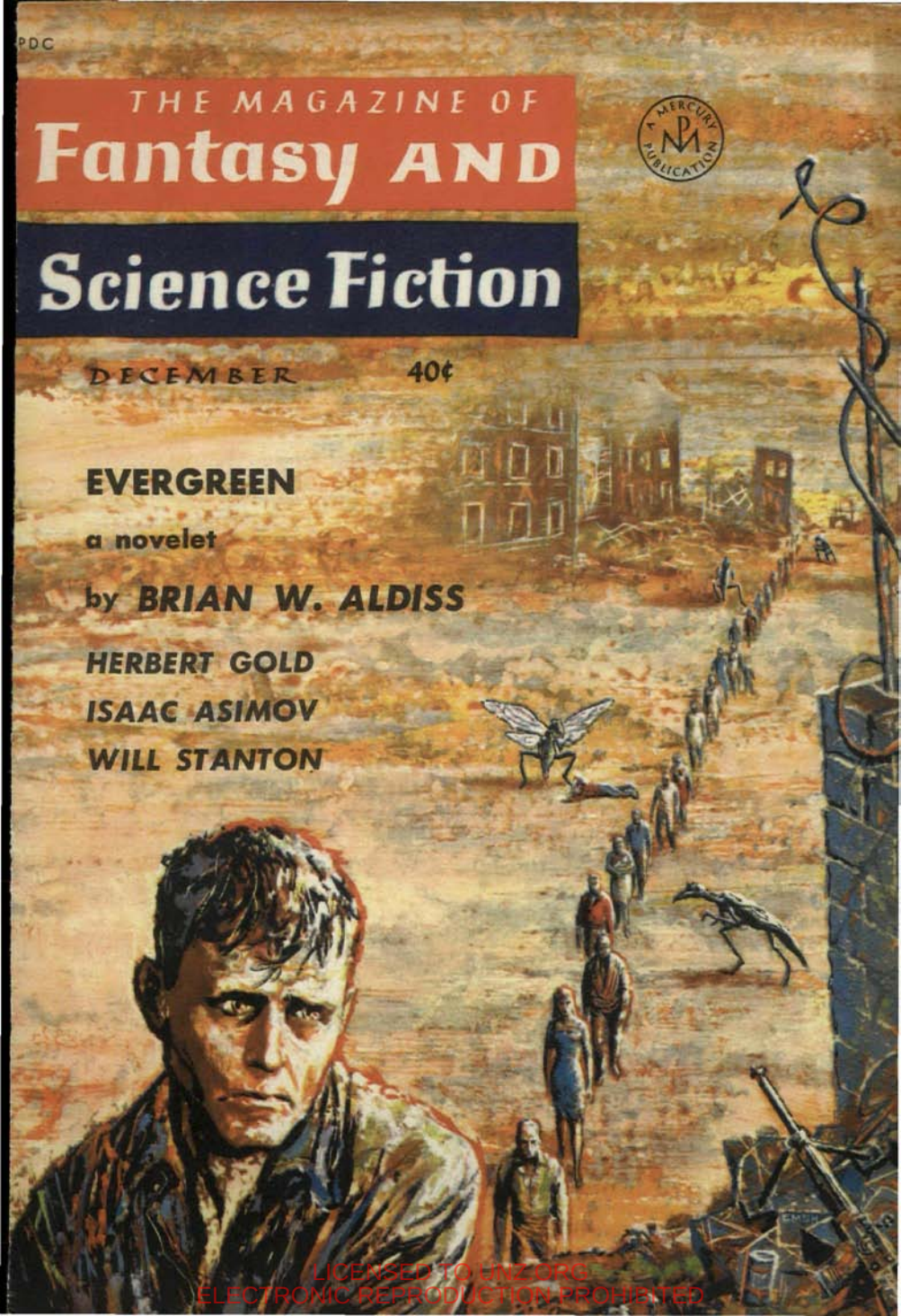
a novelet

by **BRIAN W. ALDISS**

HERBERT GOLD

ISAAC ASIMOV

WILL STANTON



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Fantasy and Science Fiction

DECEMBER *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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(illustrating "The First Days of May")

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In this issue . . .

In our June issue we published a story by John Anthony West, called "George." It concerned a man attacked by creeping atrophy while watching television, and it drew a number of favorable comments. It occurs to us belatedly that you might be interested to know that the story was originally conceived and written as a play, and that its publication here resulted in five inquiries as to the availability of the dramatic rights. Radio rights have since been sold in Canada, and negotiations are currently in progress for the off-Broadway rights. . . . Mr. West's story on page 48 of this issue, incidentally, was *not* originally a play; it is, however, also included in a collection of Mr. West's stories, titled CALL OUT THE MALICIA, which was published in England by Heinemann last fall, and which will be published here by Dutton in 1962. . . .

The new Heinlein!

Robert Heinlein, winner of the Hugo Award for the best book of science-fiction, now writes a "Fast paced story of what happens to the only Earthman raised on Mars."—*Denver Post.* "An excellent yarn."—*Chicago Tribune.* "Additional proof that science-fiction can be good literature."—*Washington Post.*

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Damon Knight reports: "Claude Veillot is a newspaperman by trade, 36 years old, and has written a book about artificial satellites and one about the art of moviemaking. When last heard from, he was in North Africa working on a movie for which he had written the script." None of which seems to have anything directly *to do with this account of invaders of Earth. . . .*

THE FIRST DAYS OF MAY

by Claude Veillot

(translated by Damon Knight)

IT'S THE NOISE THAT HAS drawn me toward the slit between the closed shutters. A furtive noise of crumbling, of crushed mica, of walnut shells being slowly cracked. For two days, not a sound has risen from that street which I can see with my eyes closed: the grocery across the way, with its windows broken by looters, its bags of dried beans spilled out as far as the gutter; the apartment house on the corner, half fallen down, its façade tumbled into the street, exposing the cross-sections of apartments, furniture hanging out mockingly over emptiness; abandoned cars, some parked along the side of the street, others left where they stopped, blocking the way, tires flat; and then those incongruous remnants strewn across the flagstones and asphalt—handbags, bundles of laundry, a baby carriage, broken bottles, scraps of newspaper, a roll of blankets, a few mismated shoes, a sewing machine . . .

Four days, only four days ago, that street was full of people. You couldn't know then that the bed in the third-floor apartment of the building opposite was covered with pink cretonne, because the façade was still in place. Customers went into the grocery. "And what will it be today, madam?" A baby was drooling in the carriage, the sewing machine was purring behind an unbroken win-

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dow, cars were running in the streets where no rag-pickers' clutter was strewn.

Only four days, and already you have the feeling that all that never existed. Wasn't it all a dream? Did I really, one day, a long time ago, walk in the sun with my fellows? Come home to a woman I loved in the evening? Listen to records? Complain about the high cost of living? Read books? Make love?

Today, the reality is this vile sound, this quiet and continuous grating noise whose significance I now know. There are two of them, coupling right under my shutters, near an automobile with its windows broken, and that horrible crunching means simply that the female is in the act of devouring the male.

They have been compared to praying mantises too often. In fact, when it's a question of that praying mantis that has such an effect on us, standing upright on a twig, with its globular eyes and its armored claws, we always have the recourse of crushing it with a blow, at the cost of fighting back a spasm of nausea. But when the mantis is as big as a kangaroo . . .

And then what kind of mantises were they, that they could conceive and use those machines that we saw on the first day, the day it all began? (Or should I say: the day when it all ended?)

I can't take my eyes away from the terrible sight. A faintness of horror makes me go on staring at that monstrous copulation, the clinging of those greenish abdomens, the vibrating wing-cases, and above all, that kind of parrot's beak grinding the corselet of the still living male, who trembles gently in all his limbs, as if in a horrible ecstasy.

Now there is another sound, thin as a cricket's chirp, then swelling to a piercing whistle, like the sound of those defective mikes at the meetings and neighborhood dances, not so long ago.

I can't help moving back a step. It's the female who is shrilling. That's where their name comes from: the Shrills. Nobody had time or inclination to think of anything else, and all things considered, it's the best name for them.

Their true, their only power lies not in being so frightful and cruel as to make us forget our worst nightmares. Nor in being so many that no one has ever been able to estimate their numbers exactly. Their true, their only superiority is in their ability to shrill. When that modulated whistling goes into the supersonic, becomes inaudible to any terrestrial ear, you can see men and beasts fall like flies, not to rise again as long as the sound lasts.

But there's worse to come, for they have succeeded in analysing

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that physiological peculiarity, defining it and then applying it to instruments of war, multiplying its effectiveness. The Shrills needed no cannon to gut our apartment buildings: the ultrasonics were enough.

Below, in the street, the female Shrill goes on modulating her love whistle. A wave of fear and hatred washes over me. Stop that hideous noise, that disgusting nibbling, the whole obscene business! I've snatched up my revolver out of the open valise on the table. The shutters fly back against the wall. Suddenly the sun cleanses this miserable hotel room where I've lived four days alone, glued in my fear, after everyone else has run off.

Shots crash out, echoing, almost joyful in the sinister silence of the empty suburb. One, two, three shots . . . The head with its monstrous eyes is burst open. The female Shrill is dead between one spasm and the next, but I can't stop firing, four, five, six, before the hammer falls on an empty cartridge.

After all these hours of isolation, of shadow and muffled silence, let there be light, noise, action . . . I'm not afraid any longer. The smell of the powder is still floating in the air. The fact that the half-devoured Shrill is still trembling doesn't frighten me, on the contrary, it sends me into a mad rage.

I've sprung out of my room, hurled myself down the stairs, torn apart the barricade of furniture and mattresses that I'd piled up in front of the entrance. . . . There's a fuel can tied onto the abandoned car; I've cut the string with one or two strokes of my knife, and pulled it down. I've soaked the two Shrills. Ten, twenty liters of gasoline . . .

I'm watching their bodies burn, crackle, snap, crack open, burst, suppurate in the red bonfire which, at the very beginning, carried off their wings and wing-cases in a quick, high blaze. I'm so close to the flames that I'm sweating, gasping—And I'm laughing.

Hours of walking through the silent streets, choked with wreckage and rubble. The smell that comes from the demolished buildings is terrible.

I couldn't stay in my hotel room any longer. Maybe the Shrills patrol past there? If they'd found the two burned monsters, they would have been quick to pluck me out of my hole in turn.

It's true that there's no lack of Shrill corpses. Crossing an amusement park, I've seen more than fifty of them rotting on the paths, on the edge of the pond and even in the middle of the little red cars, and the miniature bicycles of a ride. They had been ripped apart by bullets.

I've also seen those who brought off this fine butchery: the crew of

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two heavy machine guns set up at the exits of the park. They were twisted on the ground, fists over their ears, in the poignant stillness of violent death. A big helmet had rolled to the base of a plane tree. Some machine-gun belts were strewn about.

There must have been some of them nearly everywhere in the city, these elements of the rear guard who'd been left there to permit the evacuation of the civil population. Sacrifices, ordered to slow up the invasion by a few minutes, a few seconds, before the buildings started to come apart around them, and repellant silhouettes appeared at the street-corners, carrying in their faceted eyes the hundredfold reflection of the same horrified human face. . . .

Isn't what I've been doing pure idiocy? There isn't a single person still living in the city, that's clear. Why should Maria have stayed? Even if she'd wanted to, they would have made her go with the rest. The first day, I remember, radio cars went through every district: "Your attention please! It is necessary to evacuate the city temporarily—the invader has succeeded in overrunning our troops! Get out to the country! Don't stay in the city! Get out to the country! Any person who ignores this order will be in mortal danger!"

From the window of my hotel I saw that infernal stampede, the brutality, fear and disorder, that frothing exodus, to which all the half-hearted official appeals couldn't bring a semblance of dignity.

I couldn't leave. Not without Maria. And perhaps also because I was more frightened than the rest, frightened enough to stay cooped up four days in a dark room. Like a coward, after all. But what is a coward, what's a hero when it comes to the Shrills?

I'm frozen to the spot when I hear the noise. In the deathly silence of the abandoned city, it echoes like an explosion. Nevertheless, as soon as my heartbeat slows down a little, I identify the sound. Memories of coffee with cream, smells of anisette, Martinis, cognac, hubbub of voices and laughter. . . . It's the authoritative bell of a cash register.

I push open the glass door of the café. Moleskin cushions. Marble tables. Is it possible that this familiar décor has anything to do with all that ridiculous horror outside?

The man hasn't seen me. Leaning over the showcase, he's carefully counting some bills, pausing every so often to lick his finger.

I barely touch his shoulder. With remarkable agility, he turns and in the same movement draws a big blue-barreled Colt. In his thin, whiskery face, his eyes are cruel and nervous at the same time; and he shows his teeth like a dog. "What the hell are you doing here?"

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He's a noncom; there's a stripe on his dirty, torn khaki sleeve.

"I haven't seen anyone for four days," I say. "I'm looking for my wife." And after a pause, "What's the news?"

He spins the pistol gracefully around his forefinger before holstering it again. "Don't waste your breath!" And tapping himself on the ear: "Stone deaf! See what they've done with their vibrations, those lousy bugs!"

Suspicious again, he examines me from head to foot. "Say, don't you know all civilians were supposed to evacuate the city?"

Then he shrugs, goes around the counter, takes down a bottle and two glasses. "Civilians, military, what the hell difference does all that stuff make now? Two days ago, I was in position near the plastic works, you know, on the other side of the river. Had to watch the people filing past, trucks, buses, cars, bikes, carts, people on foot. . . . Couldn't have been one out of two that knew what was happening to them. The radio hardly had time to explain what was going on and bang! No more radio! 'It's the Russians!' they said; or else, 'It's the Americans!' Nobody wanted to believe the official statement—that story about invaders that they called . . . how'd it go again? . . . extra-terrestrial."

He lifts his glass to clink it with mine. "Never mind telling me bottoms up, I won't hear you! . . . It was the same with us, anyhow, we didn't put much stock in that story. It was hard to swallow, am I right? Well, they explained it to us, anyhow, that these characters came from another planet. But which one? They told us they had them already in the U.S., Canada, England too, maybe even in Russia. But how could we tell? They said we'd have to fight, this time, not for territory or for ideas, but for our own skin. Okay, but what with?"

Aiming his two forefingers one behind the other, he whistles between his teeth. "Oh, the flamethrowers, they didn't go so bad at the beginning. We went at it hot and heavy, I can tell you! Have you seen those bugs up close? Don't know why, you get a crazy urge to kill them, crush them, destroy 'em. We went after them with our torches—we burned piles and piles of them! But that didn't last. They started in shrilling. Nearly the whole company went down. We fell back to this side of the river, and if you'll believe it, the Genius blew up the bridge!"

He bursts into laughter which suggests anything but gaiety.

"As if that would keep them from jumping, those bugs! A Shrill can hop a good twenty meters, and with those damned wings they can keep going a little longer. I understand they could do a lot

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better, if Earth gravity didn't bother them! No, no, don't bother to open your mouth, I tell you! I can't hear a thing! You know what we're going to do, you and me? We're going to try to find a car, or an army jeep, and we're going to get out of this damned town. The people must be somewhere, right?"

I shake my head.

"What? You don't want to stay here the rest of your life, do you?"

I open my mouth, then change my mind, tear a sheet out of my notebook and write: "I've got to find my wife."

Leaning his elbows on the counter, in the familiar attitude of a saloonkeeper, he scratches his ear, at once ironic and compassionate. "Oh well anyhow, that's love for you!"

What a strange feeling to go through this series of motions: take a key out of my pocket, slide it into a lock. I've entered my apartment this way hundreds of times. Maria would be waiting for me. That seemed natural. There'll never be enough time to regret the indifference with which I took that simple happiness.

The apartment is full of darkness; all the shutters are closed. I don't recognize the familiar smell that means home. In its place, there's an intrusive odor, persistent and heavy: the scent of a cigar.

I open a door. A man is sitting crosswise in an upholstered chair, his legs hanging over the arm-rest. He has on a grayish undershirt; he's smoking an enormous cigar and reading one of my books, while he scratches a three-day beard.

To top it all, it's he who looks at me and exclaims, "Well! Don't stand on ceremony!"

The only light on him comes from three candles stuck to the top shelf of the bookcase. He has hollow cheeks, anxious eyes. Do I, too, have that hunted look?

I take a step. "Maybe you don't know it, but you're in *my* chair!"

He puffs. "The persistence of bourgeois concepts after the disappearance of the society which created them is one of the most hilarious aspects of the event."

A phrase-maker. Good. He can't be very dangerous. See him encompass space with a gesture. "Nothing left! All consumed! Everything is broken down in the most frenetic, most repugnant, most definitive of routs! And what do we behold now? A survivor . . . Who knows? The last, perhaps? And what does he do? Does he repent? Does he swear to rebuild a better world? No. He demands *his* chair."

I let myself fall on the sofa; fatigue cuts my hamstrings. In the wavering light of the candles, I watch the man suck on his cigar. He takes it out of his mouth and

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says quietly, *"And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle."* His voice rises slowly. ". . . *And their faces were as the faces of men. . . .*" Eyes on the ceiling, he seems to be deciphering the prophetic text up there. *"And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions!"*

The Apocalypse!

"I recognize you! You live on the sixth floor. You're the one who writes books. . . ."

"I lived on the sixth floor, correct! But this is bigger, more comfortable. And then there's the bar, and the library as well. My word, you were a man of taste!"

"I'm looking for my wife."

"That way too, you were a man of taste! But I must tell you she's not here. When I picked your lock, it was because I knew there was nobody left in here."

"She's gone?"

He makes a vague gesture which flattens the candle-flames for a moment. "Gone with all the rest, when they passed with their loudspeakers. Idiots! Leave, to go where?"

She is gone. She didn't wait for me. She was afraid. But didn't I myself stay shut up four days in a hotel, too terrified even to open the shutters?

"What about you—you decided to stay?"

He puts on a profoundly disgusted expression. "It's because I can't stand crowds. During the exodus, in '40, when I was a kid, too many people stepped on my feet. Morning and evening, for weeks, the crowds of people that mashed my feet! Anyhow, do you want me to tell you where they ended up, the ones who listened to the loudspeakers? In camps."

"Camps?"

"Camps, yes. Prison camps. That's what I don't understand. After that slaughter, the Shrills cared for the survivors. As soon as we stopped resisting, they stopped destroying. Curious, isn't it?"

He relights his dead cigar. "You think I've been here all this time without budging? You're mistaken. I've gone out, I've walked, I've pinched bicycles and even a car. Not to escape—to look. I've seen some things, some things. . . . What a spectacle! Have you gone down in the subway passages? There are thousands of burned Shrills. You walk in pulp up to the knees. They installed their first colonies down there. The army poured in tons of incendiary fluids through all the entrances and the air-holes. . . . You can bet, after that there was a shrilling!

"I also argued with dozens of people, soldiers, civil defense guys, chemists, biologists, scientists . . . They were looking for something, a method . . . Some of them talked about making contact, negotiating a settlement. Pitiful! The Shrills have never tried to

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communicate. They arrive, they shrill and that's all! Some say they're organized, therefore intelligent. Oh, certainly! After all, so are the ants and the bees! But you've got to attack the problem from the other end. Imagine for a moment that in their eyes, *we're* the ants. Would it bother you much to break up an anthill with a few kicks? And did you ever think about negotiating in any way with the ants?"

He gets up, opens my bar with great ease of manner and takes out two glasses, into which he pours stingily. "I'm saving the whisky. There isn't much left. You know, actually, these Shrills interest me. What do they want? We don't even know where they come from. From one of the moons of Jupiter, a scientist claimed, the other night on the radio—before the radio stopped like everything else. But what did he know about it, *hm*? I ask you. In any case, one thing is certain: they have absolutely no interest in us as thinking beings. They don't even seem to be aware of that peculiarity of which we're so proud. They're intelligent and highly developed too, undoubtedly, but in a way so different from ours that it doesn't pay to look for points of comparison."

He points his cigar-butt at me. "Have you seen a Shrill visit just one house? Examine a machine? Try to start a car? Show any trace of curiosity in a heavy machine-gun or a telephone booth? No. Except for the machines that brought them here, you'd think they lack even the idea of technology. Of course, I haven't forgotten the shrilling machines, the ones that knock buildings down, but who can say he's seen one? I heard a biologist remark that they could get the same results just as well by simply shrilling in chorus. So?"

He goes on talking as if to himself, getting rid of thoughts he's repeated over and over, in his hours and days of solitude. "They haven't tried to rebuild, or even occupy, damaged cities. Even the colonies in the subway were provisional. Later they were satisfied to set up their gelatinous towns out in the open fields, like heaps of yellowish cocoons, piles of insect nests. A collectivist activity, a purely functional civilization, whose standards are entirely alien to human intelligence."

He slaps his knee. "But just the same, by heaven, if they've come all this way, there's a reason for it!"

I drain my glass and get up suddenly. "I have no intention of looking for the reason here, while I jabber into a glass of whisky. I want to find my wife."

He salutes me, with a nonchalant hand at his brow. "Good luck, noble spouse! Close the door carefully as you leave."

"Those camps you were talking about—where are they?"

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"At the city exits. They're not camps, properly speaking. They look more like gypsy tents, or vacationers' camp-sites. No fences, no barbed wire. They're surrounded by Shrills, that's all. I've watched one, at a distance, naturally, with a pair of field-glasses, from the top of an HLM building. The people seemed to be in good condition. There were kitchen details. Things were organized. I saw women doing their laundry in tubs, some guys playing ball. I saw kids, too."

He falls silent. In his burning eyes I see again the anguished flame they had at the beginning. "Don't ask me to go with you. I won't go. That camp with the wooden barracks, the tents, the washing on the lines, kids playing, and then all around, here and there, those goddam big grasshoppers . . ."

His shoulders shake with disgust. "Those people guarded by—by that—it was more horrible than anything else, than houses destroyed, corpses in the streets, the crazy soldiers with their hands over their ears, the stink of the subway—I don't want to see that camp again."

"If I recognize my wife there, can I get to her?"

"Oh, certainly! The Shrills are understanding, just think of it! While I was watching, up on that roof, I saw a lot of people go in, poor starved characters, attracted by the smell of cooking. But as for getting out again . . . No, I won't go with you, even if I have to croak here of hunger and thirst."

I put my glass down, move slowly toward the door and turn. I can't help smiling. "Have you looked in the kitchen, on the top shelf of the cabinet? There must be still a full bottle there."

I didn't get as far as the camp. I met the man long before that. He was walking in the middle of the street with a self-assurance, a lack of caution, that was absolutely stupefying. His leather-visored cap, the bandolier he'd squeezed on over his overalls, the carbine he was carrying by the strap—were these really enough to give him that swaggering confidence, that complete detachment, as if he were convinced of his own invulnerability?

All the same, when I hailed him, he seized the weapon quickly and brought it up to his hip. He handled it with impressive skill.

I stepped away from the bus with the flat tires, behind which I'd hidden when I first heard his footsteps.

"What are you doing there? Aren't you in camp with the rest?" He stared at me, finger on the trigger.

"That's just it, I'm looking for the camp—my wife may be there. I've got to find her, you understand?"

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He relaxes a little. His teeth show in a smile. "Are you really trying to get into a camp?"

"Into the one where I'll find my wife, yes. I've got to find her. The war is over, isn't it?"

His smile widens. "Sure, it's good and over. A long time ago! And as long as you want to go to the camp—why, I'll just take you there."

He turns, holding his weapon by the strap again. Another man, a skinny little guy with the thick glasses of the near-sighted, had just appeared at the corner of a devastated bakery. Sticking up over the shoulder of his checkered jacket, the Garand rifle seemed as huge as it was incongruous. Five others followed him, but these were weaponless, their shoulders drooping, eyes full of dull pain. They were being pushed along from behind by the barrels of machine-pistols.

"This gentleman wants to go to the camp!"

The tone of his voice chilled me. The armed men broke out into astonishing smiles; the others were staring at me with bewilderment, and the little near-sighted man let out a sort of yelp: "A volunteer! Now I've seen everything, everything!" He stamped his feet with joy.

The man with the leather visor was bowing with artificial politeness. "Will the gentleman allow himself to be searched?"

The near-sighted little guy began to go awkwardly through my pockets. He finished by taking out my billfold, examined it, closed it, then made as if to hand it back. When I went to take the billfold, it slipped through his fingers, and it almost seemed to me that he'd done it on purpose.

I bent over, feeling as if I were in the midst of a nightmare, watching myself live through a story invented by myself with God knows what goal of horrid pleasure. At the moment when I was about to pick up the billfold, somebody's foot sent me flying.

I got up. Behind the portholethick glasses, the nearsighted little man's eyes were like those of a fish. No more malignant, no more friendly.

Now I'm marching with the rest. The man with the leather visor walks fifty meters ahead of us across the wreckage and rubble. The nearsighted little man and his skirmishers follow us in dispersed order.

"What came over you? Are you crazy or what?" It's the man next to me, muttering between his teeth, without turning his head toward me. On the collar of his navy blue uniform are the gilded insignia of the combined transport service. To keep his hands from trembling, he's squeezing them together behind his back.

"I want to find my wife. She must be in a camp."

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"My wife was at the camp too. She was there with me. Then yesterday, they came looking for her."

"The Shrills?"

"No, of course not. The Shrills don't come into the camps. They're satisfied to hang around the outside. It's these guys here that come looking for people."

"These men? I thought—"

He chuckles. "You see the little guy with the big glasses? Don't argue with him—do whatever he tells you. I saw him kill with his rifle two women, who tried to escape from camp.

A nauseating thing. I had thought the Shrills were rotten, but the Shrills aren't men. . . .

"What now? Where are they taking us?"

"I don't know. When they take away a bunch like this, you never see them again. I waited for my wife. They didn't bring her back."

"Maybe they're regrouping people in other camps? Maybe we're going to the camp where your wife is already?"

He shrugs. "You're kidding! You've seen what happened, haven't you? You've seen how those vermin destroyed everything, killed everybody in four days? You've seen these characters that are guarding us? If they're taking us someplace else, it's because it's useful to them—the Shrills. That's all."

"If that's how it really is, why not run for it?"

He turns his head toward me with a wan smile. Go ahead, try!"

At the entrance to the Winter Circus, a number of Shrills are crouching on their barbed legs. They're the first I've seen since the ones I burned this morning, in front of the hotel. I stop short, my blood frozen. It goes beyond fear—it's an unconquerable repulsion that glues my feet to the ground.

A hand pushes me between the shoulderblades; it's the little nearsighted man. "Keep going—they won't eat you!"

The other guards guffaw.

Does that curious noise come from the Circus—that whirring sound, thin and yet loud, that reminds me of the sound of crickets in the wastelands of Provence? And where does that heavy, thick, stale odor come from, that *green* smell? . . .

I didn't see anything at first except the circular fence set up on the outside of the track. And in that cage; a Shrill. He was standing upright, the anterior legs stiffened horizontally, and pivoting slowly around. I realized immediately why he was turning that way, and I felt the hairs prickle on the back of my neck: a man was facing him, walking slowly around him, with a saber bayonet in his hand.

I hear one of the men next to me whisper, "My God!" while our guards push us into a box. I go

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closer to the railing, fascinated. Down there, the man and the Shrill are keeping their faces turned toward each other. They're both on the defensive, watching each other, waiting. Sweat is streaming down the torso of the man with the bayonet. He has leather leggings on his calves; he's a soldier. I can't tell if it's brute fear or the courage of despair that I see in his eyes. Both, maybe.

Those legs, sharp as saw-blades, have suddenly lashed the air. The man has leaped aside, with astonishing agility. A notch is cut into his bare shoulder.

The low grating sound which fills the whole Circus is suddenly amplified, and at the same instant, I see what the terrible spectacle in the cage has kept me from noticing. They are there, filling the seats, in the penumbra surrounding the track. Hundreds and hundreds of them. Almost frozen motionless, prodigiously attentive. The Shrills.

But that isn't the worst: among the Shrills I can make out men, and some women too, their faces pale with anxious pleasure, their mouths half open, eyes fixed, riveted in the same expectancy. One of them is dressed in her best. She's wearing a white hat, and a resplendent clip in the lapel of her tailored suit. I can't take my eyes off that clip.

Once more, the heavy collective vibration has turned feverish. There's a yell from the jeweled woman. The man in the cage tears himself out of a clinch at the very moment when that parrot's beak is about to seize him by the nape. Blood spurts out of his torn back. From where I am, I can hear the whistling in his lungs.

"You're next! Get ready!" The man with the leather visor is looking at us through the railing in which we're confined. He shows his uneven teeth in an open smile.

"You can't let it go on! You can't! Don't you understand?" One of my companions, a fat man who till now has never stopped taking off his rimless glasses and putting them on again, is clinging to the bars, making them shake with his own trembling. "You can't! You're a man like us!"

The other man falls back a step. "Why can't I? It's a fair fight, isn't it? For one thing, we give you a bayonet. And then, your opponent doesn't have the right to shrill. The audience either, of course."

He adds, turning his head away: "What do you think, I invented this game?"

Others are throwing themselves on the bars too. One of them, a big young man in blue jeans, sobs hysterically and falls to his knees. Only the man in the navy-blue pea-jacket, the one who spoke to me before, remains to one side. He's pale, his nostrils are pinched; he holds himself very straight,

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closing his eyes. If he weren't here, I'd grab hold of the bars too, I'd howl too, the way the rest are doing.

The murmur has suddenly turned to an intense humming, like the sound that comes from an overturned hive. I can't help looking. The soldier has managed to leap onto his enemy's back. His courage is too much for me. Why so much vitality, when there's no hope?

Then everything happens very quickly. The bayonet scythes through the air. The Shrill's head leaps like a football, while the huge trembling body, in a final spasm, sends the man rolling in the sawdust. He springs up, hurls himself back—his weapon rips open the green abdomen, which bursts and empties itself; then he attacks the corselet and splits it. But it's all over. The long, armored legs are moving only in an imperceptible, interminable shiver. The feverish humming fills my ears. I hear the voice of the man with the leather visor:

"You're in luck! It's not often that one of them gets it in the neck! When that happens, the games are postponed till the next day. Come on, get going!"

"The first days of May, they're the best for vacations. Remember the woods? The smell of the woods? The smell of leaves? Remember the squirrel in Mervent forest? The mill at the water's edge? Remember the lost clearing, where the silence is so beautiful that it makes you weep? The only sound is that of the green woodpecker. Rap, rap! It sounds like a stubborn elf who's knocking endlessly at the door. His wife doesn't want to let him in, so he knocks, he knocks. . . . In May we'll go back there!"

So spoke Maria.

It's May, and I'm rolling across the countryside, but it's in a truck that stinks of fuel oil and sweat, packed in with strangers, men and dejected women, their eyes empty.

Those who guard us have metal helmets or cloth caps. With their weapons between their knees, they are at the same time watchful and distant, as if detached from us.

I watch them. Some are dull brutes, others half mad, still others are cowards. But they are men. Don't they understand what they're doing? I look at them, but they will not meet my gaze. I know how they react when questions are added to these looks. One of us is lying on the floor, his forehead laid open by a blow from a rifle butt.

When the truck stopped, the first thing I saw was the farmhouse. It seemed so simple, so natural with its old rough-cast walls, its untrimmed vines climbing around the garret windows, so simple and so beautiful that tears came to my eyes. But it was immured in silence, and no one

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moved in the house, nor in the deserted stable, nor in the vacant barnyard. Even the doghouse was empty. On the tractor seat was a baby doll, one of those big celluloid dolls that little girls dress up in wool jumpers. It had an arm missing.

Then I looked beyond, at the fields.

"Gelatinous masses, like heaps of yellowish cocoons, piles of insect nests." That was the way my neighbor, the writer, had described the Shrill towns.

The paths we followed to get to it were hard and beaten, as if thousands of feet had trodden them before us. When the first Shrills showed themselves, a few of my companions fell to their knees and had to be dragged.

I don't think I'll ever go insane, or I would be insane now. How could we have let ourselves be pushed, dragged into the interior of . . . of what, in fact? What kind of a town are these domes joined together, piled up one on another, these hills of moist cotton, secreted no doubt by the same creatures who live in them?

Someone laughs nearby, a girl with short hair who looks around her with a happy expression, as if in a dream. That one, perhaps, has found her deliverance.

In the tunnels, the stale, viscous smell grows so thick you can almost feel it. A pale, cold daylight, without brilliance, springs from no visible source, maybe just from these fibrous walls which, when you bump into them accidentally —and not without repulsion—deposit on your sleeves cottony, gluey particles, feebly luminous.

Other guards have replaced the first ones, and there are Shrills with them now. We walk, but we no longer know where we're going. Some are crying soundlessly, but they don't know they're crying. Are we really living through this, have we forgotten who we are?

The tunnels cross and multiply without ever rising or descending. And why should we be surprised when we cross that larger gallery, as big as a subway station, with walls pierced by a thousand cells? Why should we be surprised if, in each one of these cells, an oblong form is stretched out, enveloped as in a cocoon by that cottony, gluey substance? We're no longer of this world, are we?

They don't move, but their eyes are open. They don't speak, their features are frozen, but in their pupils shines the wavering spark of life. Horror and despair, incredulity, hatred and madness.

More tunnels. More cells. Hundreds, thousands of cells, and then the end. Time is suddenly suspended. Silence, and the waiting Shrills.

Their bellies are gigantic, swollen to the bursting point. These are the females. The first days of May . . . egg-laying time.

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Why does that old man suddenly begin to struggle, and that woman with the dyed hair, too? Since three guards can hold them easily? Since the sting of the female Shrill is so quick? Since ankylosis and paralysis, in a few minutes at most, will seize their numbed members, their defeated muscles, leaving only the vital organs functioning, and the brain clear?

That blonde hair, spread out on the floor of a cell, is like Maria's hair, and those golden eyes that stare at me are like Maria's eyes. This blonde woman looking at me, entangled in her nightmare, frozen with horror—does she already feel inside her the slow working of incubation? How long has she been there, and how many little Shrills will be born inside her, to feed on her, before they emerge from her torn flesh into the gray light of the tunnels?

I've found you, Maria. For you might easily be Maria, mightn't you? Do you want to be? You're of my race and you're my wife, and I've searched for you and found you. The Shrills don't understand what we are. The Shrills keep us in camps the way we keep herds on the range, but we're not cattle. The Shrills lead us to combat like bulls in the ring, but we're men, just the same. The Shrills store us and pile us up the way wasps store up their provision of flies for the winter, but we're not flies. And the female Shrills lay their eggs in us and leave us to be devoured alive by their little ones, but in spite of everything you are Maria and I'm the one you loved. The Shrills don't understand that, never will understand it and that's why we're greater than the Shrills, Maria.

Two guards take me by the elbows. I point with my chin toward the shadow from which the wide-open golden eyes are still staring at me.

"Next to that one is where I want to be!"

"All right," says one of the two without looking at me. And he adds, with an odd catch in his voice, "You realize, we're not responsible!"

Not responsible? No, of course not. No one is responsible, or else everyone is.

The man who drank my whisky had it by heart: *"And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle. . . . And their faces were as the faces of men. . . . And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions . . ."*

The female Shrill is coming nearer . . . She doesn't even seem horrible to me.

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Mousy Morton Sneeves found himself suddenly acting out the leading role in the Great Dream of Everyman. It was delightful while it lasted, but left unanswered the question of who really was the fairest one of all.

THE MIRROR AND MR. SNEEVES

by Herbert Gold

"YOU'RE SO UNDERSTANDING, Morton. Somehow you know just how to get inside people." Both his mother and his wife said this, but still he feared that they never really understood him at all. Did he get inside of people, or did people get inside of him?

As he emerged from the subway, sticky and panting for air, blaming the heat for his question, he solemnly wished that he could really crawl inside someone else—say, a burly body that could triumph over the crowd in its daily struggle in the subway, or a wiry body that could slip unscathed through the stifling summer heat, or a contented body that could laugh from the belly, or an agile body that could deal with a wife with pride and abandon. . . . "Hey, this ain't no escalator," someone bawled behind him. "You think you're thinking, you? Get a move on!"

Mr. Sneeves had paused on one of the steps of the subway exit. Startled at the command, he moved with the crowd and was propelled by it out onto the street. Habitually, he sucked his chapped lower lip and, in his embarrassment, he clutched the umbrella which sometimes consoled him—although he certainly did not expect rain in such weather—and he knew that if he could melt into some body he would scorn these terribly foolish, middle-aged habits of day-dreaming, talking to himself, and carrying an umbrella. The sweat from his hatband skipped down into his collar.

He knew, entering the apartment house where he owned a suite on the cooperative plan, that the week-long argument with his wife would be continued at supper. He said that, on an accountant's salary, they had paid too much for the apartment and

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should try to sell it; she said that the two-and-a-half rooms were just right for a childless couple and that she didn't want to move again and besides, where would they move?—and what they were each blaming the other for was the long hot summer, and the conviction after ten years of marriage that they would never have the children both wanted. "You don't really love me, Morton," she often complained.

"Oh, I *do,*" he said, while all the time both recognized certain obvious substantiations for her charge. She wanted a boy, just like her father, and he wanted a girl, just like his mother. Well, he thought, slapping the umbrella irritably against his trousers, I do my best. Mother always said I was the sensitive type. Maybe I'm just too sensitive.

"Good evening," Professor Gibson said, meeting him at the door. "Home so late, Mr. Sneeves?"

"What? Oh. Good evening," said Mr. Sneeves. Passing through the doorway into the apartment, he hardly saw the professor. Instead he noticed that the mirror near the elevator in the foyer was dirty, and decided to make a note of it upstairs on his kitchen pad. It should be brought up at the next tenants' meeting. Mr. Sneeves was careful about such things.

However, on this sweltering evening in late August, when he felt somehow wrung from himself amid the stagnant remains of the day's heat, the speckled mirror no longer seemed really significant to him, nor did working late at the firm while old Vattock took his annual vacation in Maine. Often Mr. Sneeves feared that the summer heat would melt the glue that stuck his joints together; tonight he even felt capable of dissolving without a trace, like the mist on his glasses when he huffed at them to wipe the dusk away. "Morton Sneeves," he said aloud, to remind himself. Some day, perhaps, the addition to Vattock, Vattock, Sallinger, Horner, Accountants, of an "& Sneeves" on the office door might supply a daily reminder that, indeed, both the ampersand and Morton Sneeves really did exist.

Meantime, after a day like this one, his own being, which oscilated between Vattock in the office on Park Place and Martha Sneeves in the apartment off Riverside Drive, impressed him as incredible, a paste toy or a foolish mechanical contraption; the intimacies of men in shirtsleeves, loitering at the curb with their dogs, or women in flowered wrappers, fanning themselves at apartment windows, were secure and alive and (he felt) in some sense closer to him than himself. Hurrying from the subway, for an instant his eyes had alighted on the news vendor, and a converging welter of noise and dim

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thought had suddenly convinced him that he *was* the legless Negro who had sold papers there in that green shack for as long as he had lived in the neighborhood. The news vendor had caught the stare and petulantly lifted a stubbed chin toward him. "The *Tribune,* please," he had said to mask his confusion, and then walked away without waiting for his change.

I didn't look just because you're crippled, he had wanted to say. He would like to have explained.

Now, waiting in the bare lobby for the self-service elevator to decide to serve him, Mr. Sneeves felt a trifle dizzy, felt an increased sense that somehow his own being was swollen in the heat, that like some perverse toy balloon it had been puffed until it cast its shadow over everything, including the news vendor —but that only a small pinprick, a *pop,* and Morton Sneeves would be gone. He took off his hat. Even the headache—the only quality during this long summer which had seemed indisputably *his*—was obscured by this sudden faintness. He sighed, a long quavering breath, and felt better. "Ah, yes," he said.

The phrase struck him as odd. The voice was not immediately familiar. He pulled out his handkerchief and regarded the initials; he liked monogrammed clothes, to remind him of the name which stood for the existence of Morton Sneeves. Mr. Sneeves sniffled twice, as if there had been a draft on his neck. The initials on the handkerchief faced back at him: BRG. It was a fine and delicate Irish linen.

And it was certainly not his.

He turned to the mirror next to the elevator and gazed into it with the myopic, slightly bug-eyed stare of a man who almost, but not quite, recognizes an acquaintance. "Ah, well," he breathed.

The man gazing back from the mirror had a large red walrus mustache drooping down over the corners of his mouth; his hair was thick and dark, and his suit, a white tropical, showed perspiration stains at the armpits. It was Professor Gibson. "Well, well," he said, letting Professor Gibson's faculty-party basso break through his throat. He moved his shoulders uneasily, tentatively, speculatively, since Professor Gibson's body was much larger than the one to which he had become accustomed; he stepped into the elevator, pressed the button, and stood bemused, mopping his brow with the handkerchief until the elevator stopped.

Then he noticed that he had pressed 5, the button for Professor Gibson's floor, instead of 3. "Well," he said, once more. The event seemed to have earned further comment. "Curious."

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He paused before the door marked B. R. Gibson, Ph.D., sucked abstractedly at his mustache, and knocked. "Who is it?" a woman's voice rang out.

"Me," he said, but no sound emerged. He cleared his throat and repeated: "Me."

"Well, what are you standing there for?" the woman demanded. "Don't you have your chain? I'm in the bathroom."

He reached into his pocket, took out a chain, and almost gaily tried one key in the lock. When the door opened his confusion lifted, and for the first time his legs drove ahead with the vigor of a confident man.

"Did you reach Fackenbee?" the woman asked, straightening her skirt as if she knew him. He felt that he knew her.

"No," he heard himself say, "but I dug up a few little bottles. I strike the rock with my staff, and lo! good brown ale springs forth. It's really chilled this time."

"What's the matter with that man? How do they expect you to teach when even the dean doesn't know what courses are offered?"

"Well, it's beastly hot." He listened to his own voice, flinching at the unfamiliar word, *beastly*. "He's probably at the shore."

"It's hot for us, too," she said, pouting, not at all appeased. "It's hot for everybody." He goggled at this strange woman, with her loose way of adjusting her skirt in public, the capricious toss of her head when she spoke with him, the intimate derogatory tone.

"Phyllis," he heard his voice whisper. That must be her name. He lunged toward her. "Phyllis!"

She squirmed away lightly. "And it's certainly too hot for *that*, old boy," she protested, giggling. "But I appreciate the gesture on a night like this."

"Ah," he said, "be a sport, Phyl."

"Look, let's have a beer."

Now it was his turn to pout. "All right, one to start with," he heard himself say, "but it's ale." He wondered if he liked it. "I won't waste it on you if you don't know the difference, friend."

It turned out that he did like it, perhaps too well.

He awakened next morning in bed once more beside the wife of Morton Sneeves, a man who could not abide the smell of either beer or ale and took his malt exclusively in the form of breakfast cereal.

For a moment he blinked at his wife. Familiar with this disappointment, he crept yawning out of bed, tiptoed through the room to avoid disturbing her, squeezed his orange juice, and left on schedule for the office of Vattock, Vattock, Sallinger, Horner, Accountants. He arrived at 8:55.

A man seldom surprised during his lifetime, Mr. Sneeves was out of practice in expressing or even feeling shock; he went about

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his day's work with but a mild sensation compounded of curiosity and hope that he might receive once more a dispensation to take up the role of Professor Gibson. For lunch he experimented with a Welsh rarebit—the sort of thing that Gibson chap might eat—but could not decide if he liked it. The willingness to take this risk, he decided, was a good omen. Good omens relieved him.

"Say, Sneeves," said Mr. Vattock, Jr., "I never saw you smoke a cigarette before."

"Just thought I'd try it once," Mr. Sneeves replied. He could not be certain, but he believed Professor Gibson to be a man with fingers dashingly stained by nicotine. He remembered Gibson's wife, wished that he had not drunk so much beer.—*pardon, ale*—and bent down flushing to the quarterly report of Consolidated Maryland & Delaware.

That evening he scurried past the news vendor where he usually bought his *Tribune,* down the street to his apartment, and smacked his umbrella impatiently against the door leading to the foyer and the mirror. He pulled himself up as Harry Hantz, who lived across the hall, tipped his straw hat with two fingers and went whistling out the door.

Mr. Sneeves sniffed the air to detect the fumes of alcohol (he found them) which customarily accompanied the trajectory of Mr. Hantz, a salesman who lived with his wife when not travelling on business. He watched Mr. Hantz out the door, moved toward the elevator, took one quick dance-step to the side, and peered into the dirty mirror. Harry Hantz peered back at him. "Chrisamighty," he heard himself say in Mr. Hantz' high-pitched drawl.

Wondering how it happened that he was chewing gum, he spat it toward the urn without even wrapping the gum in paper. I'm discourteous to my neighbors, he thought with delight. The wad landed in the sand with a soft plop. "Good shot," he said aloud. Whistling "Night and Day," his leather heels clicking against the floor, he stepped into the elevator and a few moments later confidently plunged his key into Harry Hantz' lock. "Hiya, honey," a girl said to him. "Whatcha bring me? Whatcha whistlin'?"

"Day and Night," he said scornfully. "Can'tcha even recognize it? There's an oh such a hungry yearning burning inside of me."

"Yeah?" she said. "Heard that song awready. Whatcha want for dinner?"

"Kiss, baby."

"Okay, rare or well-done?" She foxtrotted across the room toward him, humming the tune. He suddenly felt panic—what if she guessed, or if the real Harry Hantz came in?—but, while he hesitated, she put up her mouth. He kissed it

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quickly. "Aw, Harry," she complained. He *was* the real Harry Hantz. He kissed her again. "Improvement," she drawled, opening her eyes, "but I know you can do better."

"Later on, baby," he said, admiring himself for the noisy assurance of that *later on*. "I'll show you my line of goods later, guaranteed in five states."

"You're some salesman, you are," she said, blinking her eyes at him.

"A supersalesman," he insisted, "best in the district, New York and neighboring vicinity. See this button here, not that one, the big one?"

"You know I saw it awready, Harry."

"Well, I was the organization's Atomic Salesman three months in a row. Let's dance."

"Aw Harry, it's too hot to get dressed. Let's stay in tonight, just for once."

"I don't mean to go out, I just mean turn on the radio. . . ." He pulled here to him and tipped back her head. "You're a dilly," he said.

"What's a dilly?"

"You are."

She squeezed his cheeks together. "Me, you monkey-face?"

"You."

"Ohhh, that's who I thought you meant."

The evening, like the one before it, ended dimly, with the conclusion of Harry Hantz' pleasantries as obscure to Mr. Sneeves as those of Professor Gibson. Upon awakening next morning, Morton Sneeves once more, secure by his wife's plump sleeping body, he tiptoed away to Vattock, Vattock, Sallinger, Horner.

During the long subway journey he made a promise to himself: When he gazed into the mirror to find himself become Professor Gibson or Harry Hantz this evening, he would not allow the essential memories to be lost; he could not fail the high resolve which led him to consider Mrs. Gibson and Mrs. Hantz with such springtime flair. Stumbling with the opportunity, he had performed neither the professor nor the salesman; he had behaved in a Sneeves-like fashion.

Satisfied with his vow, he considered taking a taxi home. He sat up straight to give himself an extra inch. How young, how spritely he felt! Though hot, what weather it was! A subway was good enough, he cautiously decided; after all, he had been given no assurance. . . . It developed that he occupied the skin of neither the professor nor the salesman, but the full folds and enlarged joints of Mr. Berman, who owned a cigar concession in the lobby of a midtown hotel and was married to a huge woman who had prepared a heavy cooked meal despite the continuing heatwave. "All right," she said, "so you forget to pick up

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my cleaning, but could you remember to get a haircut at least? At least, I mean. Sit down and eat."

"Did you hear from the kids?" he heard himself ask, working his toes into the slippers which she had brought him.

"Eat," she commanded.

This too, the dinner and the nap which followed it, ended in the morning with his awakening, Mr. Sneeves once more, bedded beside his wife.

The desire which he remembered feeling toward Mrs. Berman —the whiteness of her arms, that softness about her throat—found no consummation in his memory, and he could hardly imagine it.

The following evening it was Mr. Saunders, the next Mr. Finnerty, and in nightly procession he became through the mirror each of his fellow tenants. He would find himself reaching in his pocket for a cigarette or a pipe or chewing gum; he felt his back curve with the weight of Mr. Gorgon's belly, his toes point out in Mr. Frame's waddle, the whiskers scratch his neck because of Mr. Dilker's disagreement with his barber about the Giants. Each evening he received an inkling of the love which these men knew for their wives (and Dr. Wallingford for his receptionist), and each evening it ended in no recollection but the vagaries of sleep—thus reminiscent, with the shock of seeing a place known as a child, of the union between Mr. Sneeves and his Martha.

There was one addition, however: that of hope. He took for granted his new-found mutability. After ten or twelve days it would have been a disappointment to begin an evening in the ordinary Sneeves-ish body which belonged to Vattock, Vattock, Sallinger, Horner, and Martha. Even the day's routine was affected by this novel excitement, this expectation. His sinus trouble vanished; dandruff no longer flecked his collar; his hands turned supple, his feet easy in their socks. These blessings (and Mr. Sneeves did not wish to minimize his gratitude) were overshadowed, however, by plans for an evening during which the consummation so devoutly to be wished might in fact be attained.

"Sneeves," Mr. Vattock, Jr., said one afternoon with a comradely chime in his voice, "I'm glad you've given up that habit. Not that I'm a nervous type, but it was very annoying."

"Which habit, sir?" Mr. Sneeves inquired.

"Rubbing your hands together. It made my back crawl."

"Oh, I'm sorry. My hands were dry, but they're all right now. My lips aren't chapped either."

"Congratulations, Sneeves."

"Thank you, Mr. Vattock."

Once, the evening when he had

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been Mr. Saunders, curiosity had overtaken him, and he had stepped over to the Sneeves' apartment and knocked. "Who's there?" he heard the voice of Sneeves call out.

"Saunders," he had said. "Could I borrow your *Times?*"

"I'm shaving," the voice of Sneeves came back at him, "but would you like to wait a minute? All I have is the *Tribune.*"

"Never mind," he said.

"It'll just be a minute," Sneeves called back.

"Never mind," he repeated, and went away, suddenly aware of his narrow escape from meeting himself face to face. You mustn't trifle with a thing like this, he realized; there were all sorts of legal difficulties involved. In his year of night law school he had never encountered a case like this one, but he felt convinced that treaspassing in another man's body was at least a misdemeanor. At any rate, it pays to be cautious.

The days extinguished what vitality remained in the workers bound to office and train during the dog days of August and September; they found no relief in the distilled water strategically located near the office manager's desk; swaying with the rhythm of the subway, they stared vacantly at each other, without recognition, even without sympathy. Sneeves clucked his tongue reproachfully as his eye travelled from one barren face to the next, from the stenographer whose mustache and thickening nose betrayed the horsy degeneration of mournful female old age, to the shoe salesman or department store clerk whose gray fat had begun to resemble the doughnuts and store cake which dominated his diet. Why, it was a scandal, Mr. Sneeves decided—a scandal. . . . Perhaps he was the only living creature in the great city who could look to evening with a glee like that with which, as a boy, he had looked forward to splashing in the stream which ran near his mother's home. His accounts at the office were served more effectively than ever before; he felt certain that an important promotion was in order, from sly hints of Mr. Vattock. Even this did not turn his thoughts devoted to each evening's adventure.

After a week in which the sun had redoubled its efforts to melt the city to wax—the newspapers had been predicting that a thunderstorm would end the long siege—Mr. Sneeves hurried home one Friday with a quickening of his heart and a strange new fear. He had not yet gained his end, love, and the proof of love in act; yet in twenty successive nights he had received the opportunity to be in turn each of the tenants of the building. Surely, he thought, the mirror would not let him settle back to the routine of his life with

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a glimpse, but no vision. And suddenly he feared that the mirror might be broken or removed.

Alighting in a panic from the subway, he began to run, and the passersby stared at this spare little man just a few fallen hairs over the line of middle-age, clutching his hat and his umbrella, sprinting as if he were a boy who had stolen candy from a drugstore.

"Your wife having a baby?" someone shouted after him.

He had to stop finally, wheezing in the thick air. There were clouds in the sky, but they had been there for days, and a great red sun cast its dull glare over the city. As he approached the apartment house, limping with exertion, he suddenly realized that there remained at least one more chance. Lolling on the steps and smoking a corncob pipe, Mr. Garcia sleepily fondled the mangy dog so often heard whimpering in the basement. Mr. Garcia, the superintendent, had once, in the dead of winter, gotten so drunk with his wife that no heat had come through the pipes for almost three days. Afterwards he apologized to each of the tenants personally, and they could not generate the impulse to discharge him. The next week they sweltered in clouds of steam; then Mr. Garcia regained his equilibrium and they went on struggling with him for heat during the remainder of the winter.

"Allo," said Mr. Garcia in his sing-song Spanish accent. "Is nice weather."

"Good evening," Mr. Sneeves answered politely. "It's very hot."

"Is nice weather," Mr. Garcia repeated. "Is very hot." After this concession, he puffed with finality at his pipe, and Mr. Sneeves ventured to pass by him into the lobby. He glanced toward the elevator and for one stricken moment feared that Mr. Garcia had removed the mirror. But it was still there, dusty and fly-specked as ever. Already, before he glanced into it, Mr. Sneeves could feel the taste of cheap tobacco in his mouth, and the rough hot grain of the corncob pipe in his hand. Mr. Sneeves, looking into the mirror, saw himself, Mr. Garcia, squinting arrogantly back at him. He chuckled softly, thinking of what Mr. Vattock would say now. (Mr. Vattock, Jr., he meant.) Well-trained, he did not think of his wife. The dog came trotting in after him, wagging its tail frantically. He stooped and patted the mangy collar.

"Is nice dog," he said.

Muttering to himself in Spanish, he slumped heavily down the dark stairway into the basement. The door to the Garcia apartment lay ajar. He pushed in. "Allo," said Mrs. Garcia, a plump perspiring woman with a damp bosom precariously cradled in a red-and-white flowered bandana. "Is very hot outside? Is very hot inside."

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"Do not complain, woman," he said in Spanish. "Is better for sun to keep warm Upstairs"—he jerked his head toward the ceiling in a short contemptuous gesture—"than Pedro Garcia, no?"

She found this amusing—the paradox, the laziness, or Mr. Garcia's unbuttoned trousers—and she began to laugh, rocking on her stool.

He moved behind her and slapped the part of her body that bulged over the edge of the stool. "Then we have time to make warm, yes?" he said.

She found the slap even more diverting than his earlier remark, and now great clear notes of laughter pealed from her open mouth, until abruptly, first wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he bent down and covered hers with a wet kiss.

This gesture lifted her to a new peak of merriment, and in order to calm her—such excitement being excessive in this weather—he found it advisable to drag her off toward the bed, unmade in a corner of the room. "Pedro! Pedro! Pedro!" she shouted. The laughter changed to squeals; Mrs. Garcia surprised him with her nimble zeal, but he found it not displeasing. In triumph he noted his full awareness of what was occurring, and observed his capacity to cope with each situation which Mrs. Garcia presented. It would not only be a great success, he decided. Why, yes, it was a positive pleasure. He felt himself swelling with pride.

"Ooo, Tico," said Mrs. Gracia.

At that moment the dog, yipping furiously, leapt onto the bed and ran back and forth over their bodies, uttering small high pitched cries. In the fright caused by the addition of this third party, Mr. Sneeves caught his breath and jumped away and at first thought only one thing: What had happened to the umbrella?

"The dog deranges you?" Mrs. Garcia said in Spanish, in a low and caressing voice. "Exit him rapidly and manipulate the door. I will wait, Pedro."

He sat up. What if the other Mr. Garcia should come back now? Without rearranging his clothes he sprang from the bed and out the door. "Allo," he heard Mrs. Garcia call after him. "Pedro, allo?"

Rushing upstairs, he broke through the doorway that led into the lobby. As the door swung open, an umbrella, which had been leaning against it, crashed into the mirror nearby; the glass shattered into a few large jagged pieces. Mr. Sneeves picked up his umbrella and brushed off a few splinters of glass. He did not need the mirror to tell him that he was once more Mr. Sneeves, and forevermore would be.

Shoeless, in his undershirt, Mr. Garcia emerged from the cellar, the dog at his heels. The dog ig-

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nored Mr. Sneeves. "I hear noise," Mr. Garcia explained, gazing at the shattered mirror. "Will fix," he added philosophically.

"Never mind," said Mr. Sneeves. "It's too dark to see anything here anyway."

In the elevator Mr. Sneeves meditated vaguely about his wife. Well, nothing ever really changes, he decided, and he tried to guess what she had prepared for supper. It was no good to be anyone else; he might as well be himself. He shrugged his shoulders in the wrinkled summer poplin. "Morton Sneeves," he said quietly. It was too hot to think of anything. Rain had begun outside at last, but the fierce summer heat still pervaded the building. He opened the umbrella, shaking it out in the elevator, for now that there was rain, he could make use of it. Mr. Sneeves sometimes talked to himself. "Nothing ever really changes," he repeated aloud.

Upon opening the door he was confused, therefore, when his wife threw herself into his arms and said, "Darling, what's been keeping you? I've been so lonely all day—" As she led him in, clinging to his arm and laughing, he noticed that she was wearing a new summer frock. Examining her narrowly, he decided that she looked ten years younger, as young as when they were first married. Well, it was no more odd than what had happened to him.

"Where did you get that dress?" he demanded.

"Darling, *you* bought it for me." She rubbed her head against his shoulder. "You've been so strange the last few weeks, darling, I never knew what to expect from you—"

"I haven't been myself."

"You've never been so wonderful," she interrupted. "And darling, you know what?"

"What?"

"If you still want to move, it's all right with me. We'll need a larger apartment when we have the baby—"

Mr. Sneeves, dropping his umbrella, heard one last piece of broken glass tinkle out onto the floor. Who else, he asked himself, had been looking into the mirror?

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Miss Canary had no chance of clearing enough for a ducket to Earth, and her only hope of shaking Callisto was to mix herself up in a shady deal with Dirty-Jets Ryan and his crew. . . .

THE OVERSIGHT OF DIRTY-JETS RYAN

by Anne Walker

I AM SITTING IN GRZHINDY'S Olde Tyme New-Yorke Room, nuzzling some Martian kabibs, which come pretty good at Grzhindy's what with Grzhindy being something of a South Martian himself, and anyway this is the only galley whatsoever in New New York or on Callisto for the matter of that. And I am reflecting on what an unjust world it is to be sure, whether you are Earthside or on a little slug like Callisto.

Because what is the floor-show but a little doll called Canary and who has a most remarkable voice, and here she is stuck on Callisto where her audience has hair growing out of its ears, though this audience will always give her a big mitt because she will always fade any request for any song she knows, and she even goes to the Clinic to render request numbers for citizens pushing escape velocity, and in fact she is safer alone on Callisto, where dolls are in crash demand, than most dolls would be with a guard of combat robots. The chances are that no job on Callisto ever builds her mazoo to critical mass for a ducket to Earth, even allowing for tips because no guy is risking unfriendly comment by making his tips as big as his better or possibly his lower nature would suggest.

Well Miss Canary is paying out with "The Only Rose on Mars" when who should peek in but Dirty-Jets Ryan, Joe the Schmoe, and a third party, in that order. Now Dirty-Jets is a space-bum who is notable for his habitual bad luck in having to conduct forced landings off base, which is regarded by the Customs sniffers with suspicions amounting to certainty. Joe the Schmoe though by no

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means an impressive guy except if you rate him on his beezer, is rumored to remove property weighing up to several tons single-handed, but this may not be so unlikely at that because the rumors identify these properties as deliveries left in orbit for their owners to collect. The third party is in no way familiar to me but I wish to say that I do not regard this as a grievance, as he has a long, mean pan and his kisser is dogged down as if cracking it will cost him maybe five chips a crack.

These characters scan the layout with some chagrin because they do not see a place to berth or even lodge a stein right off. But it so happens that I am snatching my ration all alone, and what do they do but come across and join me. They tell me I need not lift, but in any case this is impractical without anti-grav, as the silent gazumbo is already berthed beside me. This makes me very nervous indeed, but I compute that the worst is that I am stuck for the tab, which goes to show how mistaken a guy can be.

Well at first they pay no attention to me while they knuckle down to some very dense conversation. They conduct this in English which is most unconventional on Callisto where anything but Intergloba is frowned on, but as my personal family are no better than immigrants from Old New York, I can track and they do not even realize that I am Mr. Bugears.

This conversation is of a very engrossing nature as Dirty-Jets is in hyper-space about a deal which I consider to be nothing but illegal, but maybe his judgment is warped by what he states will be quite galactic profits because when Dirty-Jets smells a profit, why there you are. It seems that there is this planet named Clayburn Van Slyck IV, though whether the IV is the serial number of the planet or of Clayburn Van Slyck, I do not gather, and here is one case where the views of the Patrol on giving a planet the great big go-by, are endorsed by all and sundry, since the population is of a most repulsive nature and discourages guests by popping off their skiffs, sending back ambassadors with total think-erasion, and other forms of disapproval. But in spite of all this, it seems that Dirty-Jets has a contact with some big pow there though he does not say at this time how he pulls it off.

"I tell you," he says joggling a free-float squash-ball, "these ragmops have so much makings for high-power jewelry lying around loose that they will shovel it across like hot ash if we do this job for them. All you have to do, Joe," he says "is raise a few Geigers on my sample so my creditors do not clamp on to The Ruptured Duck," and he rolls the ball to Joe the Schmoe.

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Now at this point what do I realize but that this ball is not a ball at all and in fact I wish to state that it is undoubtedly the most white-giant sized emerald I ever scan and I am greatly shaken up by this spectacle. But I can see where publicity will be most distasteful to Dirty-Jets and even a very small percentage for handling such a deal will be as good as the Spacemen's Retirement Benefits, and I say as follows: "Well, Dirty-Jets, I might get you an inside drop with Fillip le Fifi, who is very broad-minded in such affairs."

But Joe the Schmoe quickly says, "Well now, the fact is that I bring my friend here to meet him up with a customer, who has priority," and he blasts off as if his oxygen is running out far from base.

Well, Dirty-Jets is now most conversational and explains how his saucer, The Ruptured Duck, is incapable of even a forced landing, suppose he gets it up to start with, till he negotiates some repairs. "And," he says, "you will wish these repairs to be of high quality because obviously we cannot leave you romping around after bugging such a confidential deal, and in fact at the very first romp I will singe your ears. But," Dirty-Jets says, "the pay will be liberal so do not fret."

Well, I can see how this is a case where controversy will only upset Dirty-Jets who is a very sensitive guy, and I am wishing that I keep my hatch sealed like the character beside me who says nothing so far but "Ulp" when he downs his tranquillizer, when Joe the Schmoe hauls up and who does he have in tow but Miss Canary. Now at this I am so perturbed I forget all about my own hardship because I do not care to see Miss Canary lose her candy in one of Dirty-Jets' burn-offs, till I realize that after all this rock is worth more than she will pull down in eighty years rendering songs at Grzhindy's.

But I am not so happy again when Dirty-Jets sells her a bill about joining the trip, because it is well known that Dirty-Jets is very temporary with his dolls and if I buttinsky I am likely to get dropped out the air-lock to walk home in my socks. But Dirty-Jets tells her how even a popular doll such as she is cannot dispose of her emerald on Callisto without arousing the low, suspicious natures of the Customs sniffers. "But," he says, "when we go Earthside, we can pay the squeeze and never miss it. This is just a marker for you, sweetheart."

Now Miss Canary gets a big field from these remarks but anyone can see that she gets an even bigger field from Dirty Jets himself because he is a strong-built guy with curling black hair and blue eyes and a little Jack-of-

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spades moustache and the sort of hell-off manners that young dolls go for. I do not know anything that will cure this point of view in young dolls except maybe experience and often not even that. But I can also see that Joe the Schmoe is greatly downcast.

Well, from then on I am overseeing repairs on The Ruptured Duck and this and that, which I do with great care because of my health, and the silent gazumbo sticks to me like a magnetic boot. His name is Zeb and he does not give out with any other or with anything much but "I 'low so" or just "Yup". He is a type I scan so far only in tales of outdoor living, which can pussyfoot blindfolded through untamed forests and eat spaghetti in a high wind without getting tomato-sauce on his bib and is generally a most discouraging type.

But once we boost, Miss Canary makes up the average for him, not only by rendering with songs but by cooking in a most astonishing style and chirping gaily to one and all and keeping Dirty-Jets under auto-pilot for the present and altogether rating as a little breeze of outside air. Even Zeb remarks "Mighty purty" when she renders, and washes plates for her, and she makes him large dollops of potato-chips of which he is inordinately fond. Only Joe the Schmoe regards her flitting here and there as if he has something on his mind and rubs his beezer and does not respond to her chirping to any extent though at most times Joe is a benign guy especially with dolls.

Well, quicker than you can say Clayburn Van Slyck IV we set down, and we are hardly cool when Dirty-Jets pops off to hitch locks with this big pow he has contacted and hauls me and Joe the Schmoe with him. This is a very big pow tagged Vzbl-89 as near as you can put it, but I will state that I am greatly disappointed by his royal shakedown which resembles nothing so much as the Callisto dump.

We zero in by a walkie-talkie radar as the Ragmops are too averse to our appearance to act as guides, till we reach Vzbl-89's personal doss-down. And when I get a fix on him, if I know any place to duck I am getting out of there like a scalded cat, because if I am one-quarter as repulsive to him as he is to me, I do not wonder that his pals give us the push. He reminds me of the butt end of the tree in New Central Park which I view before they plug it in, only he is very active and in among himself he has eyes like egg-plants bugging out and other things I do not much enjoy. In front of him is a dingus that grates his remarks into Interglobe as follows: "Do not think I am fluttered by your ghastly appearance. I will use you unflinchingly and I will pay you well if you come through."

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Well whatever else you can say about Dirty-Jets Ryan, he is anyway a vertebrate and he says like this: "Lay down your hand, Your Imperial Ragmops, as our time is expensive and we would not wish to break the bank."

I do not know what Vzbl-89's translator makes of this, but Vzbl-89 logs us the situation. It seems that these Ragmops, though allergic to human beings, are very fond of such spectcles as you will see at the Museum of Modern-Modern Art, although personally I will not give you a dried-up Z-ration for the whole museum. They get this junk through Vegan traders, and it seems that a neighbor who is a pain in whatever pinch hits for Vzbl-89's neck, has clamped his lunch-hooks on a very superior specimen of modern-modern art by a beaver named Miro de Braque Tutthope, and in fact this specimen is as modern as a new-laid egg and Ragmops from Vzbl-89's territory are skipping over the state line in flocks which reduces Vzbl-89's status more than somewhat, and what Vzbl-89 wants is that Dirty-Jets should nab this peep-show.

"Why," says Dirty-Jets, "I can do better yet for you. I can have this beaver Tutthope set you up with a gallery," he says.

But Joe the Schmoe now cuts in with some very disconcerting data, because Joe is always an outstandingly well-informed guy. It seems that this beaver Miro de Braque Tutthope is very high strung and one day in a fit of pique over the moldy state of public taste, what does he do but stage a protest sit-down on the New Greenwich Village power-pile and before the gendarmes can fish him off he is fried sunny-side-up and scratched from all future dabbing. So the only course left is to proceed according to plan.

"Of course," Vzbl-89 grates, "you could not get into Flff-73's shebang if he did not radar you in like I did, and the sacred picture is hung in the central egg-chapel to influence the hatching eggs. But," he says "once every kloon Flff-73 takes it out for a public showing and parades it to the sacred grove and pokes it in there while they all gzrch outside. You could easily bob in while they are gzrching and toot off with the sacred picture."

Now Dirty-Jets Ryan is a very fast guy with a suspicion and so he says, "This is all very fine. But if this snatch is such a free lunch, why do you not pull it yourself?"

"Why," Vzbl-89 grates back, "because any of our Master Race is noticeable to any other even in the dark. But you flat-eyed monsters are practically no shape at all and will blend perfectly with the background, and this is why I call you in in the first place," he says.

Now from what I see of the local shrubbery, he is quite right

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about this, as the bigger upgrowths make me think of a mob of stiffs doing a pyramid act, and Dirty-Jets evidently thinks the same because he laughs and says, "Lay on, MacWhuff."

Vzbl-89 twiddles into the next cave and shows us his jackpot, which is several no-shape holes in the floor filled up with rocks of various sorts, some of which are just plain rocks but more of which are uncut emeralds and sapphires and this and that, and you can gravel a fair sized hydroponics tank in any one of several colors out of this load. We study the display for quite some time till Dirty-Jets remarks "All we can carry away, huh?"

"Sure," Vzbl-89 says, "if you are really so stupid. But I would not cheat even a monster and will pay off in Zhsh roots if you like."

"No," Dirty-Jets says. "We are plenty stupid and this will do."

So Vzbl-89 programs us on where Flff-73's sacred grove is, and about the next kloon when all of Clayburn Van Slyck IV's moons are bunched up, and gives us the old here's-your-hat-what's-your-hurry routine.

Well back at the saucer, we find Miss Canary in full chirp because some of the Ragmops kindly leave us a ton of fresh vegetables which she claims are great delicacies. Even Zeb is all thawed out to two above zero because one of these vegetables closely resembles a skiff-size potato and Miss Canary makes him some chips which are without doubt the all-time title-holders. So we heave-to and wait for the kloon.

Now as this approachs, Dirty Jets and Joe the Schmoe and Zeb prepare for action but they count me out because they do not want any chickens on such a deal as this, and anyway somebody has to chaperone The Ruptured Duck and Miss Canary. They stick their belts full of sparklers and nuggets and they are not wearing much but belts so that they will blend with the background like Vzbl-89 says. They have a rucksack of food because they intend to be on location well in advance, and they take a reef in their upper lips except Zeb whose lip is reefed tighter than a bip-drum at all times, and take off on safari.

Naturally I am somewhat restless because if an accident befalls Dirty-Jets Ryan I do not think Joe the Schmoe can handle anything bigger than little bitty skiffs for removing property in orbit and Zeb is useful only for leading the way through untamed forests. Miss Canary flits around the saucer assembling lunch and singing tra-la. "You seem very confident," I say.

"Of course I am confident," she says. "Hughie—Mr. Ryan—is the cleverest and bravest man in the Galaxy, and such a contract as this is child's play for him. Do you not think so?"

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Well, I would rather have Miss Canary singing tra-la than worrying, so I do not express my reservations but mop up with her lunch including potato-chips and help her swab off the crockery and chat merrily of this and that, and so forth and so on. But about the time our task-force is due I rubber out onto the balcony and scan for dust on the road while Miss Canary in the galley is rendering with various ditties and presently she renders with one which she has been working overtime recently and which is a very long-whiskered ditty called, "My Hero," and just as she is really giving out with, "Come, come, I love you only, Hero Mine!" what do I observe but human-figures coming very rapidly indeed.

These are Dirty-Jets and Joe, and their knee-action is really most remarkable. They do not even slow down at the ladder but continue on up as they are at null-G, and this is not so surprising at that because the scenery is buzzing with Ragmops who are moving almost as fast as they are. Dirty-Jets slams me inside the lock and has the outer door clamped before I can get up, and roars, "Acceleration-couches. Minus twenty countdown." And unlikely as it seems, he boosts at one and the same moment the intercom calls, "Zero."

Now when we are in hyperspace and flutter weakly to the lounge, Dirty-Jets is very apologetic. "But," he says, "I do not figure to linger till the Ragmops remember the do-hickies they use for popping off skiffs." And it is universally agreed that he has shown great foresight, and Miss Canary begins to pass out the nose-bags she is preparing all day to celebrate jackpot, even if we do not hit it. But then she suddenly does a double-take'em and says like this: "Where is Zeb? Did the take-off hurt him?"

Well at this Dirty-Jets looks very cast down and replies in a low, sad voice, "No, the Ragmops got him."

Now I do not consider this to be very strange, all things considered, and though I do not actually wish Zeb any bad luck I much prefer that the Ragmops get him rather than Dirty-Jets because Zeb will not boost us in twenty seconds or even at all and I suppose Miss Canary will feel even more so. But she looks as if the air has been let out of the cabin and after a long while she says as follows: "Oh!" and keeps on serving.

I am much surprised at her distress even if Zeb does help her to swab the crockery, but I am even more surprised when she puts a chill of zero Kelvin on everything all the way home and does not even render. And altogether it is a great relief when we berth at a set-down called Idlewild near Old New York.

Of course there is the customary

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to-do with customs sniffers but we do not have even communicable diseases on board, and finally a sniffer smacks a sticker on the front door to spring us. Now no sooner does he do this than Miss Canary ankles onto the balcony carrying her little suitcase and begins saying good-bye to me. I can see that Dirty-Jets is much jolted and he says in a hearty voice, "Stay in orbit a minute, baby, till I get suited up and I will show you the town."

Well Miss Canary gives him a look that will put a ground-frost on the sunny side of Mercury and says, "You have already shown me all I care to see. I do not have any use for cowards." And down she goes.

Dirty-Jets looks for a minute as if he will cut up rough, and then he shrugs and says, "Well that is a doll for you. If they think you are under high G they will strap you down tenderly but when you are in free-float they will give you a punt out the lock."

Now I feel that Dirty-Jets has a point here, and I am greatly bewildered myself by Miss Canary sounding off as she does which will be a great knock to her reputation as a fair-minded doll. However I do not see any percentage in bandying repartee on the subject, so I simply get my own duffle and bow out.

Well first I invest a few weeks seeing New York but even the wad I draw at Uncle Sammy's for the gravel I palm while I am inspecting Vzbl-89's gravel-pit runs thin and I pick up my passage-option and boost for home.

Naturally when I am on Callisto Firmo again, I lay a course for Grzhindy's and what is the first thing I see but Joe the Schmoe putting the fission on a ration of gefillte soybean. So I slot in opposite him and ask about his health and stand him a couple of tranquillizers, and after the second tranquillizer I lead up to what is on my mind since we part, like this: "Joe whatever causes the disaster back yonder? I get the impression that Dirty-Jets thinks the deal is a shoo-in."

"Well," Joe says, "since you are in on it, I will break radio-silence, although I do not call it such a disaster at that. I am very fond of Dirty-Jets but," he says, "he is very temporary about his dolls and Miss Canary is a nice little doll, and in fact she is the loveliest doll I ever get my viewplates on, and it is a crime if Dirty-Jets busts her all up," Joe says rubbing his beezer. "And besides, if this big bull lugs home a crate of ice, he will plunk the bottom clean out of the market including Miss Canary's emerald, and she will be without visible means of support till she spears a contract which is not easy even with her voice.

"But of course," he continues, "it is Zeb and not me who pushes

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the firing-button in a most surprising manner. He is programmed to walk through untamed forests without scaring the deer, and all such, but," Joe says, "he has his limitations. You will remember how Miss Canary is so involved in whomping up dinner that I offer to whomp up our lunches, and what do I whomp for Zeb but these white-giant potato-chips he is so fond of, and so I do help indirectly to hair things up. Although," he says, "if I precog what will come of it, who can say I will not do it anyway."

"Well," Joe says, "Zeb cons us in to this sacred grove without scaring any deer, and we settle down with our lunches to wait for the game. And sure enough pretty soon the Ragmops begin to arrive like a baseball crowd which gives me the cold shiveroo as they are no cuter out of their caves than they are in them, but they do not notice us because for their money we are no shape whatsoever and also we remain strictly behind trees or whatnot. So by and bye here comes a Mardi Gras of Ragmops festooned with assortments of refuse and finally a crew carrying this dab of Miro de Braque Tutthope's, and although Miro de Braque's style is a bit difficult to pin down, it certainly fits in nicely with the scheme of decoration.

"Well," Joe says, "they shove this dab in the grove, and all begin rolling their eggplants and tying knots in their twiddlers, like a camp-meeting in Venusport Aquarium, but they do not make even a squeak. It is most disturbing, but Dirty-Jets finishes his coffee and gives the high sign and we stand up. Now at this there is a noise behind us like a horse having lunch in a bin of ship's biscuit, and what is it but Zeb standing up, because however many Boy Scout badges he may have, no guy is going to eat potato-chips without dropping crumbs particularly such outsize chips as these, and in fact Zeb is practically ankle-deep in crumbs which go scronch when he moves his feet, and not only that but Zeb lets go with a "Mighty Purty!" you can hear out to Sirius. Now at this all the Ragmops around and about shoot their twiddlers straight up and bug their egg-plants, and Dirty-Jets yells, "Red Alert!" and fires off like a super-photic missile and naturally I take the hint but," Joe says, "the last I see of Zeb he is scanning his feet in a disjointed way, though I suppose he will soon get over his surprise and tag along. But as we approach home plate, I see that such is not the case and inform Dirty-Jets, who considers Zeb a valuable asset and if we do not have Miss Canary back on the ship he may turn around and frazzle up a mess of Ragmops and try to recover Zeb. Because whatever else you can say about Dirty-Jets Ryan, which is quite a bit to

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be sure, he is a fighting fool and is not apt to abandon a valuable asset without a struggle. So I am glad about Miss Canary because our chances are not five to twenty-three if we blast it out with the Ragmops. And from there on," Joe says, "you are as well programmed as I am."

"Well," I say, "this is indeed a stirring tale and it clears up several points that had me grounded. But," I say, "I am still not as well programmed as you are because I still wonder why Miss Canary makes this knock about Dirty-Jets being a coward."

"Probably," Joe says taking a deep haul on his mug, "it has something to do with him running out on Zeb. Of course, I take something of a knock myself on that account but," Joe says in a flat voice, "this does not greatly matter because young dolls are not much for guys with out-size beezers anyhow. The main thing is that Miss Canary is clear of Dirty-Jets and has a nice roll and a chance to meet up with plenty of young guys who will clamp onto her till death do them part if she says so, and who have stock-size beezers."

Now I am deeply surprised and I say that up to now I do not score Miss Canary so low as to boot a guy because he sacrifices a valuable asset to save her life, and I think Miss Canary's noggin is out of contact.

"No," Joe says finishing his tranquillizer, "she does not see it that way because—and Dirty-Jets helps this mistake no little by leaving the eating-simulator in Zeb's program—little as you might suppose it of any doll who works for Grzhindy, she does not hitch that Zeb is nothing but an android robot. And so," Joe says, "she gets a warp that Dirty-Jets runs out on a live tovarich. And now I must go see a Martian about a kark," he says.

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A man we know reported for work as usual one recent Tuesday morning to discover that overnight the company had suspended operations, and everybody was fired. A party spirit set in among the employees, and one clearly engaging chap hastily put together a large sign which read: "Help stamp out reality." . . . We nominate Will Stanton for high office in the club.

YOU ARE WITH IT!

by Will Stanton

"THE DEEP FREEZE HAS BEEN acting up again," Kay Dobbs slid into the breakfast nook across from her husband. "I wish you'd call the man as soon as you get to the office."

Stanley Dobbs folded his paper to the editorial page. "All right."

"Tell him it hasn't worked right since the last time he was here." She reached across and folded back a corner of the paper to examine an advertisement for handbags. "Did you remember to call your friend about the speaker for the P.T.A.?"

"I'll do it first thing."

"Better phone the phone company too. Find out about that long distance call they charged us for."

"Yes, I'd better do that."

"I think it makes more of an impression coming from a man," Kay said.

Stanley backed his car out to the street. Kay waved goodbye from the picture window. It was the custom in Belle Acres for wives to wave goodbye from their picture windows.

At the end of the block Stanley joined a small stream of commuters winding their way down to the station. Here, along with the members of other tributaries, they were picked up by the train much like a river picking up silt to be deposited at the end of its run.

Stanley was reviewing his schedule for the day as he stepped into his office and closed the door. Immediately he was aware of certain changes. In fact the office bore slight resemblance to the room he had left the night before. It was more like a half lighted stage with

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billows of mist rising from various points on the floor. In the center, seated at a small round table, was a solitary figure in evening clothes. When he spoke his voice had a hollow, artificial quality, rather like an actor rehearsing in the bottom of a well.

"How do you do?" he remarked in a faintly bogus British accent, "won't you join me? For the next 90 minutes I am to be your host."

"How do you do?" said Stanley. He hesitated and then walked over, placed his hat and briefcase on the table and sat down.

"You are now where no mortal has ever been," the Host was projecting his voice as if addressing a vast audience; "you are just over the horizon. The exact spot? Well, you won't find it on any map nor the date on any calender."

"It's the seventeenth," said Stanley. "Tuesday."

"It is twenty-five hours past midnight on the thirty-first of November," said the Host. "You are about to start your perilous journey into the unknown."

Stanley looked at his watch. "I did have a couple of phone calls to make—"

The Host smiled. "Perhaps I have been needlessly mystifying you," he remarked in a more conversational tone. "This, as you may have guessed, is a new sort of television program. It is a combination of adventure, supernatural and audience participation. A chap from Duke University suggested it."

Stanley nodded politely. "It sounds very interesting."

"It is more than interesting," said the Host, "it is voodoo, black magic and witchcraft brought into every home through the marvels of modern communication. For the first time a member of the viewing audience will actually be able to take part in the violence and terror that have brought happiness to so many."

"I'm afraid I haven't been keeping up with T.V. lately," Stanley admitted. "Since we put in the new patio we've been sitting out there a great deal."

"When the time comes you will know what to do," the Host assured him. "You are not being asked to play a part—you are going to live the part. Mr. Stanley Dobbs—You Are With It!" The last words were picked up by echoing voices and repeated in tones that faded with the light until Stanley found himself alone in the dark and the silence.

As the lights came on again Stanley discovered he was standing beneath the marquee of a night club. The doorman bowed—"The Comissioner was here looking for you," he said.

Nodding absently, Stanley went inside and sat down at a quiet table in the corner. There was a good crowd present, eating,

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drinking, and listening to the music of Arabella and her All-Girl orchestra. After a moment he was joined by the proprietress—Big Yvette. "We haven't seen you for quite a while," she observed.

He shrugged. "You know how it is."

"Yes, I know." Big Yvette placed her hand on his. "I worry about you."

"I have a job to do," Stanley said.

"I suppose we shouldn't complain about that," she said, "with so much unemployment and all."

A waiter approached the table. He was carrying a bottle of Napoleon brandy. "Compliments of Arabella and her All-Girl Orchestra," he explained.

"Oh." Abruptly he realized that the music had stopped.

"They're backstage," the waiter told him.

"I'd like to thank them," Stanley said. He went back and entered the dressing room.

The orchestra leader looked up with a cry of delight. "Darling, we've missed you," she put her arms around his neck.

"I just wanted to thank you," he said, "before I left."

"Before you left?"

He nodded, "I have a job to do."

"Oh." There was disappointment in her voice. "We were hoping you could come up to our place after the show."

"Our place?" he repeated.

"We share an apartment," she indicated the other members of the band. "We've taken the top floor of the U.N. Hilton."

"Let's just say I'll make it if I can," he said; "you know I'd like to."

Her arms tightened around his neck. "You really mean it?"

He looked down into her eyes. Turning his head he looked into the eyes of Francine and Iris and Millie-Jo and Ursula and Gretchen and Dee and Carlotta and the rest. "I mean it," he said.

Outside the club he caught a taxi. "I got a message for you," the driver told him, "from the Big Boy himself. He said to lay off."

"He did?" said Stanley, coolly lighting a cigarette. "I heard the Big Boy was knocked off last week."

"He was," the driver said. "But I been in bed with a cold. This is the first chance I had to deliver the message."

"Let me out at the next corner," Stanley said. He paid the driver. "Better take care of that cold," he said.

"They say summer colds are the worst kind," the driver said.

Stanley went into a vacant garage, down 3 flights of stairs and rapped on the door. It was opened by a man whose face was known to no more than three or four persons in the entire country.

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"Good evening, Chief," Stanley said, following him into the luxuriously appointed office.

"I don't believe you have met the Contessa." The Chief gestured toward a beautiful young woman sitting at one side of the room in an ermine wrap. "She will accompany you as far as Budapest. After that you will be on your own."

Stanley bowed. The Chief unrolled a map. "We have learned that the secret police are holding the Professor in a fortress at this spot. It will be your job to get him out of the country unharmed. You will follow our standard procedure in dealing with the guards. As for the electric fence, the dogs and the mine fields you will no doubt wish to use your own methods."

"It seems pretty much routine," Stanley said. "I should think one of your regular operatives could handle the job."

"The Professor himself presents no particular problem," the Chief conceded. "However, smuggling his cyclotron out of the country may prove more difficult. I think it only fair to warn you that it may involve considerable risk."

Stanley shrugged. "That's what I get paid for."

"So you do." The Chief put down the map and picked up his pipe. "Is that the real reason you do it?" he inquired casually. "For the money?"

Stanley smiled a tight, cryptic, little smile. "There are certain persons who criticize what we call the American way of life. I don't happen to be among them. And when something threatens that way of life—" he paused to smile again, "I do what has to be done."

The Chief nodded. "How soon can you leave?" he asked.

The next morning Stanley was late coming down to breakfast. "You'll have to hurry or you'll miss your train," his wife said.

Stanley swallowed his juice. "If I have to hurry I'll hurry," he said, "I've done it before."

"I wish you didn't have to work late so often," Kay said, "I didn't even hear you come in."

"I didn't notice the time."

"I don't suppose you remembered to call the deep freeze man? Well, we're going to have to do something about the water softener too."

"All right."

"I've made out a list," she said, "I've put it in your breast pocket. For one thing I think you ought to call several boarding kennels. You know how busy they're going to be at vacation time and last year I'm sure they didn't remember to give Mr. Toidy his grated carrots."

"I'll make a point of that," he said.

"I simply can't stand it when an animal doesn't receive proper care," she said; "it does something to me."

Stanley was a little late getting

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to the office but the truck was waiting. He climbed up in the cab beside the driver. "Do you know that old warehouse down on sixth?" he asked.

"Sure," the driver nodded, "but it won't be open this time of night."

"I've got a tip that they're running a brewery there," Stanley said. "How much speed can you get out of this truck?"

"Could be fifty—maybe fifty-five," the driver said. He revved up the engine. "It ought to be enough to break through the doors."

"It's worth a try," Stanley said.

They rammed the doors and came to a halt in the middle of the warehouse. On both sides of them were rows of barrels. There was no one in sight.

Stanley seized an axe and handed one to the driver. "I'll take this side and you take that one," he said. Raising the axe he drove it into the top of the first barrel. Then he went on to the next. He and the driver reached the end of their rows at the same time. He leaned his axe against the wall. "How's it going?" he asked.

The driver wiped his forehead. "All the barrels on this side got dishes in them," he said.

"Same here," Stanley said. "It looks like somebody gave me a wrong steer."

"Well," said the driver, "you can't win them all."

Stanley rolled down his sleeves. "There's just one other possibility," he said.

In the gambling room Stanley moved from table to table, killing time. One of the dealers beckoned. "The Boss wants to see you," he said. "Upstairs."

Stanley nodded. Upstairs the door was opened by a hard faced man who motioned him inside. The Boss was seated at the head of a long table. On either side were assembled all the notorious names of the underworld.

"We've been expecting you," the Boss remarked in a silky tone. He moved his hand to indicate the others—"I believe you may know some of these gentlemen."

"I believe so." Stanley nodded. "Abdul — Agasis — Albrecht — Alvarado — Andradi — Antorski — Aristides — Aspasian —"

"Yes," said the Boss, "now then—"

"Bakunin — Baldini — Bauman —" Stanley continued strolling beside the table—Beckhold—Bernardo—Bjornstrom—Black Eagle —"

"Let's get down to business," the Boss said. "You'll find a package at the end of the table."

Stanley gave it a casual glance, "What's in it?"

"What does it look like?"

Stanley opened the package. "It looks like two and one-half million dollars," he said, "in small bills." He tossed it back on the table.

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"It's yours," the Boss said. "Take it. Go on a vacation somewhere."

"Perhaps I forgot to tell you," Stanley said; "I have a job to do."

The Boss studied him, his eyes narrowed. "We'll double it."

Stanley returned the stare. "There is such a thing as the American Dream," he remarked softly, "and when any group or organization threatens to destroy it—well—" he smiled briefly—"there are a few of us who do what we can."

"So?" the Boss's voice was dangerously low. "You would really like to believe we would all allow you to leave here alive?"

"Say that again—" Stanley was playing for time. He shot a lightening glance around the room, calculating the odds. He had gotten out of tighter corners and the element of surprise was on his side. He closed his eyes for a moment, his mind rapidly formulating a plan.

When he woke up, Kay was in the kitchen. He could smell the coffee. "Did you remember to check with the man about the garage door?" she asked when he was at the table.

"He wasn't in."

"I wish you didn't have to spend so much time at the office," Kay said.

He reached for the marmalade. "I have a job to do."

"I know, but you don't have to kill yourself."

He put marmalade on a piece of toast. "That's true."

"The insurance is due today," she said.

At the door of his office he paused for a moment and then went in. The Lieutenant looked up from his desk. "Sorry to bother you," he said, "but this one really has us stopped."

"Is that so?" Stanley sat on the corner of the desk. "Fill me in."

The Lieutenant lifted his hand helplessly. "What is there to tell? The man was found on the steps of Grant's Tomb. Young, well dressed, no signs of violence—no identification—no witnesses. The autopsy showed him to be in perfect health—if he'd been alive, that is."

"I see. Then you don't have any idea what killed him?"

The Lieutenant got to his feet, pacing across the room. "I've stopped having ideas," he said. "Maybe we killed him. Society—maybe that did it. There seems to be a new sickness now—no goals—no ideals—nothing to live for. Maybe one of these days we'll all just stop living."

"Well, Lieutenant," Stanley remarked, "I don't see why you don't just throw in the sponge. Enjoy yourself while you can."

The Lieutenant gave him an irritated glance. "Don't talk crazy. I'm getting paid to do a job."

"You say there was no identification on the body?"

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The Lieutenant shook his head wearily. "No wallet, no keys, no letters—nothing but this." He picked up a slip of paper from the desk. "This was in his breast pocket. It appears to be some kind of code, but the boys in the cipher room haven't been able to break it yet." He tossed it across the desk.

Stanley picked it up and started to read. "Deep fr.—board ken.—P.T.A.—phone phone co.—gar. Dr.—pay ins—" His eyes traveled to the bottom of the paper—there seemed to be about 40 entries. Somewhere in the back of his mind was an elusive wisp of meaning.

"Does it mean anything?" The Lieutenant asked quickly.

"The pieces are all here," he said slowly, "or most of the pieces. If I can put them together—"

"Sorry gentlemen—I'm afraid it's all over—" the two men looked up, startled, to see a shadowy figure in the doorway. It was the Host.

"All over?" The Lieutenant stared. "What do you mean?"

"The show," replied the Host. "At the last minute the sponsor changed his mind."

"The sponsor?" Stanley said.

"Actually the sponsor's wife, I believe, but that is neither here nor there. At any rate you are now free to return to your normal everyday lives."

Stanley turned slowly toward the Lieutenant. "Our normal, everyday lives."

"Quite right," said the Host briskly. "And now if you will turn in any props you may have—"

Stanley reached in his pocket and drew out the pistol.

"Is it loaded?" the Host inquired. "You'd better empty it."

"Yes," Stanley said, "perhaps that would be best." When the gun was empty he dropped it on the desk.

The Lieutenant looked thoughtfully at the figure on the floor. "Sometimes we have to do things we don't like," he observed; "It's all part of the job."

"I know." Stanley picked up the slip of paper from the desk. He folded it carefully, then leaned over the body, and tucked the paper in the breast pocket.

"There *is* such a thing as the American Dream," the Lieutenant continued softly, "and when someone threatens to destroy it—"

"We do what has to be done," Stanley said. He put the gun back in his pocket. "I guess that wraps it up."

The Lieutenant frowned. "There's still one detail—I hate to ask you but we have to get telephotos of a certain office. The only place they can be taken from is the top floor of the U.N. Hilton. It will mean being confined there for a week or more—"

Stanley shrugged. "As you said, Lieutenant, it's all part of the job." He turned then, and walked slowly into the night.

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This story strikes us as being less obviously real than the author's last story here (see note in "In this issue . . .") and at the same time is less provably fantasy. Indeed it is included here on the hope rather than the conviction that its eeriness derives in large measure from unreality.

THE FIESTA AT MANAGUAY

by John Anthony West

BOB GRIFFIN, SURREPTITIOUSLY, placed his hand on his wife's knee, half hoping the other passengers on the bus would notice, and Betty Griffin blushed, rewarding him with a look of shy, newlywed well being. Although she disliked his tendency to pet in public, she recalled the advice of her manual: "If your husband demonstrates his ardor openly, don't discourage him. As long as he stops short of indecency . . ." She put her hand over his and pressed it with reinforced sincerity.

They were on their honeymoon; on an all-inclusive tour; the tour a welcome surprise and bonus wedding present from Bob Griffin's father commemorating his graduation in the top third of his class at Midwest University (17,674th out of 68,893). They were having a marvellous time. Already they had visited the Caribbean islands, had made the loop of South America, touched Central America briefly, and now en route to Mexico City, having seen the ruins of Chichen-Itza, they were stopping for the fiesta at Managuay. Bob Griffin's hand crept past Betty's knee, and she stopped him (comfortably short of indecency) but smiled her knowing smile. The smile returned, he sank back into the deep plush seats: married life, as he had written on a hundred post cards, was the greatest.

The air-conditioned bus fled, a silver stripe, up the highway from the airport to the city, and the passengers speculated on the fiesta. Their brochure, prepared by experts; flowery, enthusiastic and detailed on other stopovers was

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curiously laconic describing the one-day celebration: "Boarding a luxurious super-constellation, we now leave the unforgettable ruins of the ancient Mayans and journey to fabulous, modern Managuay for their fascinating and unique fiesta." No more.

There was a gasp of simultaneous, unanimous surprise and the passengers dove for their cameras. Around a barricade of cliffs appeared the city, thrust against the sky, tall and serried, white under a desert sun, countless windows beaming beacons of light out at an arid countryside. The bus flanked the city; then streamed down broad boulevards to a chorus of oohs and aahs.

The guide met them at the hotel, a comfortable ruddy man in a neat tropical suit. Had it not been for the placard he carried, "New World Tours", he would have passed for one of the tourists. He introduced himself and led the group inside.

A dozen buses stood before the hotel, yet the lobby was no scene of bustle and scramble. Like the rest of the city, bright, modern, air-conditioned, psychologically sound, it conveyed, nevertheless, an aura of luxury. For instance, though the six glass doors were activated by photo-electric cells, at each was placed a doorman, splendid in livery, standing at benign attention, whose sole duty was to smile gravely at guests.

The guide outlined the itinerary. After washing up and settling the luggage, the tourists were to convene at the bar to drink their complimentary cocktail. After the cocktail a walk about the city was planned.

The streets were festooned; pennants and streamers fluttered from light posts and gay banners were hung across wide streets. The sidewalks were crowded with modishly dressed men and women; and numerous groups of tourists trooped after their guides. Bob and Betty Griffin remarked on this and were informed that the fiesta was a part of most all-inclusive tours. There was expectation in the air.

The Griffins lolled behind their group. They were holding hands, inspecting a shop window when, unnoticed, from a deep entrance, a beggar emerged and tapped Bob on the shoulder. Unsuspecting, he turned, and recoiled in horror from the apparition at his side. A dwarfed hunchback with a riddled face plucked at him and held out a twisted hand for alms. Hastily Bob drew out his wallet; gave the beggar the first bill he touched. The hunchback looked up silently, took the bill, nodded a thank-you, and drifted back to his retreat. The Griffins, shaken, hurried to catch the group.

The guide was unsurprised. "You gave him something?" he asked calmly.

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"Five dollars, I think. He was so . . ."

But the guide smiled and nodded disapproval. "No, no," he murmured.

"He took us by surprise . . ."

"At that rate you'll soon be penniless," said the guide, and reached into his briefcase. He began distributing rolls of pennies. "It's included in the tour," he reassured them.

"Pennies," said Betty. "Are there so many of them?"

"We have our share, naturally. But of course they come from everywhere for the fiesta."

"But can't you prevent it?" Bob asked. "Pass a law or something?"

Once again the guide smiled tolerantly. "Why it's their fiesta. Weren't you aware of that?"

The group clustered about him, they shifted uneasily from foot to foot.

"A fiesta for hunchbacks?" Betty asked incredulously.

"No. Not just for hunchbacks. For all of them; lame, blind, deaf; the lepers and spastics. For all the maimed and misfit. They come every year while they can, wouldn't miss it for the world. The City of Managuay invites them."

"Gee, it's a nice gesture," said Bob Griffin.

"It's the least we can do."

Warned now, they began to notice beggars everywhere. Close inspection revealed the frayed collars and cuffs, the patches, the faded materials. It was late, and they kept to the twilight, but the group soon acquired night vision and spotted them; in corners, doorways and dim niches; sitting quietly on park benches; melting into chance shadows, hunched in the far corners of street cafés. And now, too, they saw the crutches concealed in the grass, the empty sleeves and trouser legs, the noseless, eyeless faces half hidden in the penumbras of wide-brimmed hats.

"You know," Bob said, "they don't look like they're celebrating to me."

The guide glanced briefly at a spastic stumbling painfully along. "Of course the fiesta doesn't begin officially until tomorrow. They're busy now with finances and plans. You'll see," he said confidently, "in their own way they enjoy themselves."

"And it doesn't disturb you? The normal ones?"

"No, we're used to it. And, after all, it is only one day a year."

"Still," said Betty, "it must be unnerving."

"Naturally we do hear objections," the guide admitted, "but frankly, if we tried to suppress it we'd hear from the Chamber of Commerce." He indicated the crowded streets with a wave of his hand. "You can imagine what this means for business."

"Even so, I think it's a darn nice thing for the city to do."

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"Perhaps," the guide agreed, "though we seldom think of it that way."

In the weeks past the Griffins had earned themselves a reputation as the adventurers of the group, often going off on their own for as long as an evening. And now they felt their position at stake. Despite the somewhat eerie nature of the evening, they asked and gained permission to detach themselves and explore independently. They left, aware of the tacit respect they commanded.

The streets became more crowded by the minute. Wraiths and spectres and derelicts drifted unnoticed into town or emerged from hiding places until, by dark, the broad boulevards were teeming. They moved slowly, shyly, almost silently, scuffling lightly or shambling hesitantly, canes tap-tapping before them. The parks were full, all benches taken, and many squatted patiently or lay prone like unwanted rags along the green promenades, or sat propped and docile against the walls of buildings and the gleaming plate-glass windows of the big shops. And throughout, behind their guides, marched bright groups of tourists, their cameras slung, glaring in the dark, abdominal third eyes.

Wandering about, Bob and Betty Griffin tried to enter into the spirit of the fiesta but the spirit eluded them and they felt uncomfortable and out of place. The silent beggars held up their hands for money, or, if they had no hands, pointed gravely with a glance to a cap on the ground. To each, the Griffins gave a penny. Not a one said thank you. Disconcerted but tenacious they distributed their pennies, and the last two they gave to a couple, unusual even in this strange congress.

The girl was Betty's age; delicate and fine, her face a cameo cut in an exquisite but decadent age. Her skin was pale to translucence, almost to opalescence; her spectral beauty held and perfected by hair once no doubt lustrous but now dull gold, the gold of antique jewelry, the faded gilt of rococo picture frames. The boy with her was her brother, perhaps a year or two her junior, with the same ageless sensitive features; and his hair was prematurely grey.

They sat just beyond a pool of light laid down by a street lamp and as Bob and Betty Griffin approached, the girl stretched out a wizened, purple, crab's claw of a hand with but two webbed fingers on it. Her other sleeve was empty. Though the Griffins had seen more and worse on their short tour, still they started instinctively. Betty could not bear to place the penny in the grisly hand, so she dropped it from the height of two inches and the coin fell and rolled away.

Both knew that retrieving the

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penny meant placing it in that unbearable hand, but while they hesitated, the girl picked it up. The opportunity to escape was there; yet the Griffins stood transfixed. The girl returned and sat by her brother but Bob and Betty merely stood—as though hoping they would think of something to say. The girl made a just perceptible motion toward her brother and Bob hurriedly extracted his last penny, this time laying it on the ground. The boy did not look up and, at the same instant, Bob and Betty, examining the pair closely for the first time, exchanged a glance of baffled surprise. For though the boy suffered the same deformities as his sister, under his one arm he guarded a violin. In the light reflected from the white concrete road the wood shone with a deep lustre. Bob wanted to ask but at that moment the girl tilted her face upwards. He couldn't face her steady gaze; fathomless, wholly without fear, wholly without warmth. He tried; but could not face the still, unwavering gaze of her dark eyes and he could not form the words to his question.

They made a show of crushing the red paper penny wrappers so beggars nearby would realize they had no more; and they walked away, ill at ease, not speaking, trying to avoid the hands that reached out to them.

Bob broke the silence. "By golly, it's different. You've got to admit that," he said. "No matter what; it's an experience."

"I'll bet there are lots of human interest stories *here,*" said Betty, who had studied sociology. "If they'd talk I bet we'd hear some real stories."

But a thought had occurred to Bob. "I wonder what they're up to," he mused. "That kid with the violin. It isn't any good to him."

"No."

"I mean they could sell it. I don't know anything about violins but it ought to be worth something."

"Yes, and they could buy artificial arms. And rehabilitate themselves. Artificial arms work very well; I remember reading that somewhere."

A group of beggars limped toward them hands outstretched, and Bob cut short his reply. He knew that he had nothing more to give, and had an uneasy feeling that the beggars might get angry. He squeezed Betty's hand and they walked briskly away, back to the hotel, relieved to flee the company of the maimed and return to civilization. Relating their experiences made them feel like adventurers, almost pioneers. They had dinner, went to a musical in the hotel theatre, and later, considerably refreshed, they went to bed, where, after consulting the manual, they made love in a new way, utilizing one of the recommended positions.

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The fiesta opened to a gala parade and the Griffins joined their group on the hotel veranda. Beneath them crowds surged and fiesta-bright flags dipped; there was the constant muffled sound of an impatient multitude; broken intermittently by the bray or honk of a tin party horn, or the comic tootle of a plastic piccolo.

From the height of their vantage point, the Griffin's group was the first to notice the approaching parade; spots of light, reflections from the brass band in the vanguard. All eyes searched the distance. Then the first stray notes reached them, then a catch phrase riding a breeze, then a continuous sound growing louder and more distinct by the moment. The music swelled and it became clear to the watching thousands that it was not music at all; a blaring cacophony, a raucous anarchy of noise. Hundreds of groups turned thousands of puzzled faces toward their guides who explained: the musicians in the brass band were the deaf. The tourists had a thousand questions but the band forbade their asking them, as, unaware of the noise they made, they marched past, slowly and with great precision. They wore superb uniforms of blue and gold and the bandleader stepped high, handling his knobbed, sequinned baton with practiced verve, directing the marchers through complex formations. Rank upon rank passed before the hotel, and when, finally, the last had disappeared down the street, trailing a welter of noise behind it, the tourists turned to each other in blank perplexity.

"I don't get it," said Bob Griffin to Betty. "Who do they think they're kidding?" but she had no time to reply.

There was a ripple of laughter down the boulevard and the guide turned and pointed:

"There they are! The clowns!"

And squinting into the sun they saw a number of objects springing down the boulevard at tremendous speed. They overtook the band quickly, then reversed direction and bounded backward in erratic courses.

The clowns were basket cases in colored flour sacks, fitted all about with strong coil springs. Once set in motion they could keep in motion by utilizing their back, stomach and neck muscles. The crowd watched fascinated as the clowns performed; like big, bright gum erasers flung from rooftops, coming down, hitting the ground with a sharp *poinnnggg* and bounding even higher; or lowering the trajectory to cover long distances in a few leaps. If one became over-enthusiastic and inadvertently fell in among the crowd, two men would seize him, fling him high into the air, and he would be merrily off on his own again. Once, in front of Bob and Betty, one lost a spring at peak

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height. He crashed to ground with a dull thud and lay inert. A policeman pulled him out of the way, for the dancers were coming.

Busy watching the clowns, the crowd had failed to notice the dancers and now thousands had materialized. The broad avenue seethed. Wave upon wave stretching back as far as the eye could see; an undulating river of brilliant color.

Dressed in extravagant regional costumes, in ballet tights, in flapper outfits, in theatrically patched jeans and checkered shirts; the lame, the one-legged, and the club-footed were an inspiring sight. Carefree and abandoned they danced to small, makeshift orchestras marching in the ranks, or to solo musicians piping strange and exotic airs. They were gay and exuberant; hopping, skipping, planting a crutch and pirouetting around it; concentrating on one-legged schottisches and herky-jerk tarantelles, ungainly arabesques and stumbling pavans. But all the crowd heard was a tangled mess of tonalities and rhythms from a hundred unconnected tunes.

Still they came; musicians with fingers missing playing flutes, a handless bagpipe player blowing a blatant whine while two club-footed men in kilts did a highland fling . . .

Now and again the dancers shanghaied a spectator; dragged him into the riotous street and made him perform while the crowd roared approval. A gap opened for the newcomer to show his skill but rarely did the tourist maintain the dizzy incongruous pace. Amid laughter, red-faced and perspiring he would fight his way to the sidelines, struggle back to his group against the flood tide of dancers. Exhausted, bedraggled, undecided as to whether he should be indignant or pleased, he would take his place in the crowd.

Often the dancers fell. Some scrambled to their feet unaided, or climbed up a crutch; others were helped up by their comrades. But often they lay where they fell. The tourists listened with expressions of distaste as the guide informed them that many died in the dance—from over-exertion and excitement. By the end of the parade, he warned, the street would be scattered with the dead. The group, the guide said, should not be alarmed.

"Stupidest thing I've ever heard," remarked Bob Griffin.

"It isn't easy to understand," the guide agreed. "After all, they could go on for years, yet they come here to spend everything on one last fling."

"That's pretty bright."

The guide smiled. "Of course, if they took the sensible view there wouldn't be a fiesta."

But Bob Griffin had turned back to the spectacle.

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Still they came; in bumbling charlestons and strutting, off-center cakewalks, in horahs and reels, and gavottes and black-bottoms. The Griffins spotted the haunting brother and sister; he holding the violin, fingering the strings, she walking alongside working the bow. To their music a group of men and women with braces on their legs danced a minuet. And all along, between the ranks of dancers, bounced clowns; popping precisely into gaps no larger than laundry baskets and bursting out, over the tossing heads.

The dancers passed and the crowd, overpowered by the action and noise had a respite. A formation of bearded men walked uncertainly by, all carrying easels, dressed haphazardly in corduroy. They wore tinted glasses and the tourists, beginning to comprehend, did not need their guides to tell them that these were the painters: the blind.

Another brass band followed and behind them a twitching regiment of spastics in athletic uniforms. Then a disorganized crowd in the finery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lepers and hunchbacks, said the guide; but the Griffins had to look closely to notice the ravaged features beneath the outrageous coiffures and tophats; twisted bodies were concealed under luxurious dresses and flowing capes. They filed slowly by and suddenly the parade was over. A few sundry freaks plodded along. A spent clown bobbed wearily down the boulevard. A truck came to collect the dead.

The Griffins and their group turned into the hotel, all feeling a vague hangover, the inevitable aftermath of a parade, when the gay streets are silent. After breakfast the itinerary called for a visit to the main plaza where the artists had set up their easels.

The artist assigned to the Griffins' group was a tall, stooped man with flowing white hair, and watching him work made Bob and Betty exchange secret smiles—until they realized that secrecy was unnecessary. The painter took himself seriously, running his hands over his subject's face before setting to work. With great show he daubed at a palette spread with colors he would never see, and he sighted down his thumb for perspective. The result of course was hodgepodge of brushstrokes that seldom resembled a face.

For the most part, the tourists entered into the spirit of the event, some even assuring the painter that he had produced an excellent likeness. One tourist, however, a stout man given to banter, told the artist that his portrait (a flattened circle scrawled over with nondescript orangish gashes) was not at all like him.

The artist drew himself to his full height, threw his brush to the

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ground and said, haughtily: "It happens to be the way *I* see you, Sir. If you want a likeness, go to the photographer."

The fat tourist, taken aback, stammered in confusion but the group smiled at him and reassured him. The artist, thinking he had beaten his antagonist, groped for his brush but it had rolled out of reach. Bob Griffin retrieved it and placed it in the artist's hand. He did not deign to thank him.

When it was Bob Griffin's turn, it occurred to him to ask the price of the portrait, and again, the temperamental artist was offended.

"You would not pay what it is worth," he said. "Therefore consider it a gift. A souvenir of the fiesta, as it were."

Bob Griffin and the rest turned to the guide with puzzled expressions; they were not accustomed to receiving things without paying for them. The guide winked and motioned to a cap that lay (now, pointed out, rather conspicuous) on the ground by the easel, then he explained in a whisper that by such little deceptions the artist maintained his pride.

When the portraits were finished, they returned to the hotel for luncheon, and after the exhausting morning, one and all welcomed the hour siesta listed on the itinerary. But at two o'clock they were awakened. The bus stood ready to take them to Managuay Field for the Spastics' track meet; the main attraction of the afternoon.

The tourists were treated to a banner day. Five records fell; a fantastic performance said the excited guide, and explained:

The fiesta had been deteriorating over the past years. Though the streets were mobbed, and the parade was still an impressive event, there were fewer revellers than previously. Furthermore, they lacked the stamina of their predecessors. Formerly, for instance, a small converted bus served to collect the victims of the parade, now a trailer truck was forced to make several trips. And of course the general debilitation was much in evidence at the track meet. In recent years, old records had not been approached, much less exceeded. Yet here, in one day, five had fallen.

The guide himself searched for a reason, but found none, and in the end convinced himself and his group that no new trend was indicated by the day's results. For despite the heroic efforts of winners, the stretcher bearers had had a difficult afternoon.

Though they knew they had witnessed a unique event, the Griffins could not honestly show enthusiasm; they could not get excited over a seven foot broad jump, or a hundred yard dash run in under a minute; and they were baffled by the elder tourists who

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seemed almost to take genuine pleasure in the afternoon. Entertaining though the fiesta might be —in its own way—the Griffins felt that the whole celebration was wasted effort, if not downright silly. The thought even struck them that it was a hoax. But it was unlikely that New World Tours would exploit their clients. It was also possible, but highly unlikely, that New World Tours itself was a victim of the Associated Freaks or whatever they called themselves. The Griffins felt an uncertainty, a disappointment they could not define.

Dinner put them in a better mood but the evening promised to be more of the same: The Lepers and Hunchbacks Ball at the old Hotel Ritz. They discussed not going but since no alternative entertainment was listed in the itinerary they had no choice.

The Ritz had once been Managuay's leading hotel but was now outdated and in disrepair; overshadowed by the chrome and glass utopias along the boulevard. And it was a strange thing, said the guide, that though many of the latter had offered their improved facilities for the Ball, they were consistently refused. It was a nuisance travelling to the Old Town, he continued, but he did concede one point; in the baroque of Grand Ballroom, the foppish costumes of the dancers did not seem quite so ridiculous.

Gas lights cast a green haze over the flaking facade of the old Ritz and concealed damage that daylight made all too plain; and inside, soft candlelight from sconces and enormous chandeliers flickered and favored the moth-eaten but still rich dubonnet of the carpet, the mildewed, intricately wrought panels of the wall, and the faded brocades of the once fabulous draperies. Somewhat subdued by the crumbling splendor, the Griffins and their group ascended the marble sweep of the stairway and took places in the horseshoe balcony overlooking the ballroom. Here too there were candles and the ball had already begun. Held in a misty light, the swaying, mincing dancers, dressed in the eveningwear of Edwardian times and earlier, were elegant and lithe; but the tourists knew that a periwig concealed a missing ear, a cape covered a hunched back and a full theatrical mask hid some unknown horror. Yet they danced brilliantly and those with full use of their limbs were graceful to the whining strings and tinkling clavichord. On the podium the orchestra played now a Strauss waltz, now a Mozart serenade and the mutilated musicians almost created harmony. The brother and sister with the violin were among them, and as the tourists watched, a thin masked man in black called her to dance. There was a short conference between the musicians

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and presently she left, went easily into his arms and floated weightlessly over the floor. In oyster white, as pale as her skin, incredibly thin and lissome, she seemed scarcely human; an imperfect masterpiece of lalique come briefly to motion. The Griffins could not take their eyes off the shrivelled hand that rested on the man's shoulder.

The music stopped, the dancers drifted apart and walked to tables gleaming with crystal and silver, liveried butlers opened champagne and corks rained on the balcony (where they were fought over like foul balls). There was caviar, exotic patés, dishes of smoked thrushes, truffles, lotus seed cakes, countless frail delicacies; more champagne. The glasses were thinnest crystal and the dancers hurled them against the walls; they fell in showers of diamond splinters.

Music rose and the dancers swirled, so fast now the deformities could not be singled out. But the dance took its toll and many fell, crumpling to the ground, their borrowed grace gone, silken marionettes shorn of their strings. Waiters in brocade carried out the fallen. The truck, said the guide, waited at the delivery entrance.

Bob Griffin turned to Betty. "You know," he said, "the guide was right. They do have fun."

"I think it's wonderful," she said, "just like Senior Prom."

Bob tapped a finger on the balustrade, when he spoke his voice was a rush of gleeful excitement. "I've got a great idea, Darling. What do you say we crash the Ball, the guys back in the House'll flip. Just one dance. We'll get one of group to take a picture . . ."

"Go down *there* . . ."

"Sure. Why not?" He said it without certainty.

"Why *not?* It must be contagious . . ."

"If it's contagious down there, it must be contagious up here. Do you think the agency would let us come if it was dangerous?"

"Gee, Bob, honey, I don't know . . ."

"Think of the great snapshot."

"It must be against the rules anyhow."

"You're not chicken?" he said hopefully.

"I'd go if you go."

"O.K. We'll ask the guide."

The guide was shocked. "No one," he said, "has ever done it before."

"Oh," said Betty expectantly; but the group was watching them with open admiration.

"But it's not against the rules, then," Bob pursued.

"No, there are no rules, but . . ."

"But what?"

"They may not like it."

"One extra couple?"

"I understand. But it *is* their ball of course."

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"If they don't like it they can kick us out." Bob Griffin grinned and took his wife by the hand.

The guide restrained them a moment. "It is understood in the event of something . . . ah . . . happening amiss, New World Tours is not responsible."

"Roger. Let's go, honey."

Without a glance backward, the Griffins left the balcony and strode down the stairs. Their group craned over the balustrade to watch.

They stood out clearly against the whirling haute couture of two centuries; Bob in a summer jacket of indeterminate powder blue, slightly darker blue trousers and crêpe-soled shoes, Betty in a bright green skirt and transparent nylon blouse printed with the heads of various pedigreed dogs. Yet the dancers paid them no attention as they swept to the music, and the Griffins stood vacillating, a bit frightened by the proximity of these swirling wrecks who now, surrounding them, displayed their infirmities all too plainly.

But all eyes were upon them and happily the orchestra began a waltz. The Griffins launched into the slow rotary about the floor with stiff, rudimentary steps. They were outclassed, perhaps, but not in the least embarrassed and they nodded to the pale girl and she went gliding by with her masked partner.

The orchestra switched to an unknown rhythm; the Griffins watched groups of eight gathering and joined one of the formations; doing their best to follow the curlicues and curtsies of the elaborate pattern. They only broke the continuity of the dance twice, and glancing over his shoulder at an appropriate moment, Bob Griffin saw that they were watched with open admiration from the balcony.

Their example inspired the young bloods in the audience, for when the next waltz began three couples in modern dress had joined the Griffins on the floor. By the time the dance finished there were a dozen and twenty minutes later there were as many tourists as dancers in costume.

The room was crowded now and the restricted space hampered the style of the lepers and hunchbacks. The Griffins were not displeased; they felt the dancers had deliberately flaunted their skill when they had been the first to take an active part in the entertainment.

Presently the older tourists arrived and the floor was so crowded that open reels and minuets were impracticable. Old costumes stood out against a background of jackets and flowered print dresses. The orchestra attempted a waltz but that too was impossible and the music ceased; for several long minutes the crowd milled about the floor.

The balcony was empty.

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A tourist suggested a fox trot to the orchestra leader. He had never heard of such a dance. The tourist obligingly whistled a typical tune, and after several tentative notes the orchestra played it, not well but passably. The dancers in costume who had not been wise enough to retreat to the sidelines were immured by the crowd. Bob and Betty spotted the pale girl and her masked partner, and the girl gazed at Bob. He thought at first that it had been with anger; but it was just horror. Not knowing the steps they stood helpless, pushed this way and that in the eddies of the crowd.

But the tourists, at home now, jammed in solid, body to body, scuffled and swayed to the familiar music.

***Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot:* XLVI**

After Richard Wagner's visit to the planet Madamabutterfly, where the natives claimed title to all operatic ideas, and where he was summarily convicted on three counts of plagiarism*, he insisted that Ferdinand Feghoot take him back there directly. "It iss abzurd!" he shouted. "It iss they vhat are plachiarists. Mein ideas are mein own!"

Feghoot fianlly gave in; and on landing they were greeted by the very same police official who had arrested Wagner before. This time, the composer refused to be shown around. Marching into a suburban district, he entered a residence. "Ha-ha!" he snorted, peering around. "Vhat iss hier mit der idea for der opera?"

"There is this post, kindly sir," said the policeman, "which meets the above-floor where is young girl's bedroom. In the night, her father puts only one rung in the hole of the post, so she can go up to bed. Then he takes it out to protect her." He winked. "But sometimes a nice suitor is coming after papa makes sleep. So this girl takes a hammer from of papa the tools chest, and puts in the hole of the post. Then she is hanging one garter upon to let the boy know he is welcome." He smiled at Wagner. "Therefore, goodly sir, you are under arrest."

"Dumkopf!" screamed Wagner. "*How* could I shteal this idea for mein beaudtiful opera?"

"I'm afraid that it's only too obvious," replied Ferdinand Feghoot. "*Gartered hammer-rung.*"

* *As explained in our April 1961 issue.*

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SCIENCE

Dr. Asimov's vast scientific erudition and skill at its communication is very nearly paralleled by his susceptibility to a questionable pun. (And no, he is not *Grendel Briarton.) The title of this article about natural satellites, and allied matters, is explained in the last paragraph, in case you wish to avoid it.*

THE TROJAN HEARSE

By Isaac Asimov

THE VERY FIRST STORY I EVER HAD PUBLISHED (NEVER MIND HOW long ago that was) concerned a spaceship that had come to grief in the asteroid zone. In it, I had a character comment on the foolhardiness of the captain in not moving out of the plane of the ecliptic (*i.e.*, the plane of the earth's orbit, which is close to that in which virtually all the components of the Solar system move) in order to go over or under the zone and avoid almost certain collision.

The picture I had in mind at that time was of an asteroidal zone as thickly strewn with asteroids as a beach was with pebbles. This is the same picture that exists, I believe, in the mind of almost all science fiction writers and readers. Individual miners, one imagines, can easily hop from one piece of rubble to the next in search of valuable minerals. Vacationers can pitch their tents on one world and wave at the vacationers on neighboring worlds. And so on.

How true is this picture? The number of asteroids so far discovered is somewhat less than 2,000 but, of course, the actual number is far higher. I have seen estimates that place the total number at 100,000.

Most of the asteroids are to be found between the orbits of Mars

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and Jupiter and within 30 degrees of the plane of the ecliptic. Now the total volume of space between those orbits and within that tilt to the ecliptic is (let's see now—mumble, mumble, mumble) something like 200,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000, cubic miles. If we allow for a total quantity of 200,000 asteroids, to be on the safe side, then there is one asteroid for every 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000, cubic miles.

This means that the average distance between asteroids is 10,000,000 miles. Perhaps we can cut that down to 1,000,000 miles for the more densely populated regions. Considering that the size of most asteroids is under a mile in diameter, you can see that from any one asteroid you will in all probability see no others with the naked eye. The vacationer will be lonely and the miner will have a heck of a problem reaching the next bit of rubble.

In fact, astronauts of the future will in all probability routinely pass through the asteroid zone on their way to the outer planets and never see a thing. Far from being a dreaded sign of danger, the occasional cry of "asteroid in view" should bring all tourists rushing to the portholes.

Actually, we mustn't think of the asteroidal zone as evenly strewn with asteroids. There are such things as clusters and there are also bands within the zone that are virtually empty of matter.

The responsibility for both situations rests with the planet Jupiter and its strong pull on the other components of the Solar system.

As an asteroid in the course of its motion makes its closest approach to Jupiter (in the course of *its* motion), the pull of Jupiter on that asteroid reaches a maximum. Under this maximum pull, the extent by which an asteroid is pulled out of its normal orbit (is "perturbed") is also at a maximum.

Under ordinary circumstances, however, this approach of the asteroid to Jupiter occurs at different points in their orbits. Because of the rather elliptical and tilted orbits of most asteroids, the closest approach therefore takes place at varying angles, so that sometimes the asteroid is pulled forward at the time of its closest approach and sometimes backward; sometimes downward and sometimes upward. The net result is that the effect of the perturbations cancels out and that, in the long run, the asteroids will move in orbits that oscillate about some permanent average-orbit.

But suppose an asteroid circled about the sun at a mean distance of about 300,000,000 miles. It would then have a period of revolution of about six years, as compared with Jupiter's period of twelve years.

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If the asteroid were close to Jupiter at a given moment of time, then twelve years later, Jupiter would have made just one circuit and the asteroid just two circuits. Both would occupy the same relative positions again. This would repeat every twelve years. Every other revolution, the asteroid would find itself yanked in the same direction. The perturbations, instead of cancelling out, would build up. If the asteroid were constantly pulled forward at its close approach, it would gradually be moved into an orbit slightly more distant from the Sun and its year would become longer. Its period of revolution would then no longer match Jupiter's and the perturbations would cease building up.

If, on the other hand, the asteroid were pulled backward each time, it would gradually be forced into an orbit that was closer to the Sun. Its year would become shorter; it would no longer match Jupiter's; and again the perturbations would cease building up.

The general effect is that no asteroid is left in that portion of the zone where the period of revolution is just half that of Jupiter. Any asteroid originally in that portion of the zone moves either outward or inward. It does not stay put.

The same is true of that region of the zone in which an asteroid would have a period of revolution equal to 4 years, for then it would repeat its position with respect to Jupiter every three revolutions. If it had a period of revolution equal to 4.8 years, it would repeat its position with respect to Jupiter every five revolutions, and so on.

The regions of the asteroid zone which have thus been swept clear of asteroids by Jupiter are known as "Kirkwood's gaps." They are so named because the American astronomer, Daniel Kirkwood, called attention to these gaps in 1866 and explained them properly.

An exactly analogous situation is also to be found in the case of Saturn's rings—which is, in fact, why we speak of "rings" rather than "ring."

The rings were first discovered by the Dutch astronomer, Christian Huyghens, in 1655. To him it seemed a simple ring of light circling Saturn but touching it nowhere. In 1675, however, the Italian-born French astronomer, Giovanni Domenico Cassini, noticed that a dark gap divided the ring into a thick and bright inner portion and a thinner and somewhat less bright outer portion. This gap, which is 3,000 miles wide, has been called the "Cassini division" ever since.

In 1850, a third, quite dim ring, closer to Saturn than are the others, was spied by the American astronomer, George Phillips Bond. It is called the "crape ring" because it is so dim. The crape ring is separated from the inner bright ring by a gap of 1,000 miles.

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In 1859, the Scottish mathematician, Clerk Maxwell, showed that from gravitational considerations, the rings could not be one piece of material but had to consist of numerous light-reflecting fragments that seemed one piece only because of their distance. The fragments of the crape ring are much more sparsely distributed than those of the bright rings which is why the crape ring seems so dim. This theoretical prediction was verified when the period of revolution of the rings was measured spectroscopically and found to vary from point to point. After all, if the rings were one piece, the period of revolution would be everywhere the same.

The innermost portion of the crape ring is a mere 7,000 miles above Saturn's surface. Those particles move most rapidly and have the shortest distance to cover. They revolve about Saturn in about 3¼ hours.

As one moves outward in the rings, the particles move more slowly and must cover greater distances, which means that the period of revolution mounts. Particles at the outermost edge of the rings have a period of revolution of about 13½ hours.

If particles were to be found in Cassini's division, they would circle Saturn in a period of a little over 11 hours. But particles are not found in that region of the rings, which is why it stands out black against the brightness on either side.

Why?

Well, outside the ring system, Saturn possesses a family of nine satellites, each of which has a gravitational field that produces perturbation in the motion of the particles of the rings. Saturn's innermost satellite, Mimas, which lies only 35,000 miles beyond the outer edge of the rings has a period of revolution of 22½ hours. Enceladus, the second satellite, has a period of 33 hours and Tethys, the third satellite, a period of 44 hours.

Any particles in Cassini's division would have a period of revolution half that of Mimas, a third that of Enceladus and a fourth that of Tethys. No wonder the region is swept clean. (Actually, the satellites are small bodies and their perturbing effect is insignificant on anything larger than the gravel that makes up the rings. If this were not so, the satellites themselves would by now have been forced out of their own too-closely matching orbits.)

As for the gap between the crape ring and the inner bright one, particles within it would circle Saturn in a little over 7 hours, one-third the period of revolution of Mimas and one-sixth that of Tethys. There are other smaller divisions in the ring system which can be explained in similar fashion.

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I must stop here and point out a curiosity that I have never seen mentioned. Books on astronomy always point out that Phobos, the inner satellite of Mars, revolves about Mars in less time than it takes Mars to rotate about its axis. Mars' period of rotation is 24½ hours while Phobos' period of revolution is only 7½ hours. The books then go on to say that Phobos is the only satellite in the system of which this is true.

Well, that is correct if we consider natural satellites of appreciable size. However, each particle in Saturn's rings is really a satellite and if they are counted in, the situation changes. The period of rotation of Saturn about its axis is 10½ hours and every particle in the crape ring and in the inner bright ring revolves about Saturn in less time than that. Therefore, far from there being only one satellite of the Phobos type, there are uncounted millions of them.

In addition, almost every artificial satellite sent up by the United States and the Soviet Union revolves about the earth in less than 24 hours. They, too, are of the Phobos type.

Gravitational perturbations act not only to sweep regions clean of particles but also to collect them. The most remarkable case is one where particles are collected not in a zone, but actually in a point.

To explain that, I will have to begin at the beginning. Newton's law of universal gravitation was a complete solution of the "two-body problem" (at least in classical physics, where the modern innovations of relativity and quantum theory are ignored). That is, if the Universe contains only two bodies and the position and motion of each are known, then the law of gravitation is sufficient to predict the exact relative positions of the two bodies through all of time, past and future.

However, the Universe doesn't contain only two bodies. It contains uncounted trillions. The next step then is to build up toward taking them all into account by solving the "three-body problem." Given three bodies in the universe, with known position and motion, what will their relative positions be at all given times?

And right there, astronomers are stymied. There is no general solution to such a problem. For that reason there is no use going on to the "octillion-body problem" represented by the actual Universe.

Fortunately, astronomers are not halted in a practical sense. The theory may be lacking but they can get along. Suppose, for instance, that it was necessary to calculate the orbit of the Earth about the Sun so that the relative positions can be calculated for the next million years. If the Sun and the Earth were all that existed, the problem would be a trivial one. But the gravity of the Moon must be considered and of Mars and of the other planets and, for complete exactness, stars.

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Fortunately, the Sun is so much bigger than any other body in the vicinity and so much closer than any other really massive body, that its gravitational field drowns out all others. The orbit obtained for the Earth by calculating a simple two-body situation is almost right. You then calculate the minor effect of the closer bodies and make corrections. The closer you want to pinpoint the exact orbit, the more corrections you must make, covering smaller and smaller perturbations.

The principle is clear but the practice can become tedious, to be sure. The equation that gives the motion of the moon with reasonable exactness covers many hundreds of pages. But that is good enough to predict the time and position of eclipses with great correctness for long periods of time into the future.

Nevertheless astronomers are not satisfied. It is all very well to work out orbits on the basis of successive approximations but how beautiful and elegant it would be to prepare an equation which would interrelate all bodies in a simple and grand way. Or three bodies anyway.

The man who most closely approached this ideal was the French astronomer, Joseph Louis Lagrange. In 1772, he actually found certain very specialized cases in which the three-body problem could be solved.

Imagine two bodies in space with the mass of body A at least 25.8 times that of body B[1] so that B can be said to revolve about a virtually motionless A, as Jupiter, for instance, revolves about the Sun. Next imagine a third body, C, of comparatively insignificant mass so that it does not disturb the gravitational relationship of A and B. Lagrange found that it was possible to place body C at certain points in relationship to bodies A and B, so that C would revolve about A in perfect step with B. In that way the relative positions of all three bodies would be known for all times.

There are five points at which body C can be placed and they are, naturally enough, called "Lagrangian points." Three of them, L_1, L_2 and L_3 are on the line connecting A and B. The first point, L_1, places small body C between A and B. Both L_2 and L_3 lie on the line also, but on the other side of A in the first case, and of B in the next.

These three Lagrangian points are not important. If any body located at one of those points moves ever so slightly off position due to the perturbation of some body outside the system, the resulting effect of the gravitational fields of A and B is to throw C still farther off the

[1] *I don't usually bother quoting my sources, but I ought to this time. I got this ratio from Hal Clement who, in addition to being an s.f. writer of major importance, is also an astronomer. He gave me Kirkwood's first name and the year he discovered Kirkwood's gaps, also.*

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point. It is like a long stick balanced on edge. Once that stick tips ever so slightly, it tips more and more and falls.

However, the final Lagrangian points are not on the line connecting the bodies A and B. Instead, they form equilateral triangles with A and B. As B revolves about A, L_4 is the point that moves before B at a constant angle of 60 degrees, while L_5 moves behind it at a constant 60 degrees.

These last two points are stable. If an object at either point moves slightly off position, through outside perturbations, the effect of the gravitational fields of A and B is to bring them back. In this way, objects at L_4 and L_5 oscillate about the true Lagrangian point, like a long stick balanced at the end of a finger which adjusts its position constantly to prevent falling.

Of course, if the stick tips *too* far out of vertical it will fall despite the balancing efforts of the finger. And if a body moves *too* far away from the Lagrangian point it will be lost.

At the time Lagrange worked this out, no examples were known anywhere in the universe of objects located at Lagrangian points. However, in 1906, a German astronomer, Max Wolf, discovered an asteroid which he named Achilles after the Greek hero of the Iliad. It was unusually far out for an asteroid. In fact, it was as far from the Sun as Jupiter was.

An analysis of its orbit showed that it always remained near the Lagrangian point, L_4, of the Sun-Jupiter system. Thus, it stayed a fairly constant 480,000,000 miles ahead of Jupiter in its motion about the Sun.

Some years later, another asteroid was discovered in the L_5 position of the Sun-Jupiter system and was named Patroclus, after Achilles' beloved friend. It moves about the Sun in a position that is a fairly constant 480,000,000 miles behind Jupiter.

Other asteroids were in time located at both points and at the present time, fifteen of these asteroids are known, ten in L_4 and five in L_5. Following the precedent of Achilles, all have been named for characters in the Iliad and since the Iliad deals with the Trojan War, all the bodies in both positions are lumped together as the "Trojan asteroids."

Since the asteroids at position L_4 include Agamemnon, the Greek leader, they are sometimes distinguished as the "Greek group." The asteroids at position L_5 include the Trojan king, Priamus (usually known as "Priam" in English versions of the Iliad) and are referred to as the "pure Trojan group."

It would have been neat and tidy if the Greek group contained only

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Greeks and the pure Trojan group only Trojans. Unfortunately, this was not thought of. The result is that the Trojan hero, Hector, is part of the Greek group and the Greek hero, Patroculus, is part of the pure Trojan group. It is a situation that would strike any classicist with apoplexy and makes even me feel a little uncomfortable and I am only the very mildest of classicists indeed.

The Trojan asteroids remain the only known examples of objects at Lagrangian points. They are so well known, however, that L_4 and L_5 are commonly known as "Trojan positions."

External perturbing forces, particularly that of the planet Saturn, keep the asteroids oscillating about the central points. Sometimes the oscillations are wide and a particular asteroid may be as much as 100,000,000 miles from the Lagrangian point.

Eventually, a particular asteroid may be pulled too far outward and would then adopt a non-Trojan orbit. On the other hand, some asteroid now independent, may happen to be perturbed into a spot close to the Lagrangian points and be trapped. In the long run, the Trojan asteroids may change identities but there will always be some there.

Undoubtedly, there are many more than 15 Trojan asteroids. Their distance from us is so great that only fairly large asteroids, close to 100 miles in diameter can be seen. Still, there are certainly dozens and even hundreds of smaller chunks, invisible to us, that chase Jupiter or are chased in an eternal race that nobody wins.

There must be many Trojan situations in the Universe. I wouldn't be surprised if every pair of associated bodies which met the 25.8 to 1 mass-ratio requirement was accompanied by rubble of some sort at the Trojan positions.

Knowing that the rubble exists doesn't mean that it can be spotted, however—certainly nowhere outside the Solar system. Three related stars could be spotted, of course, but for a true Trojan situation, one body must be of insignificant mass and it could not be seen by any technique now at our disposal.

Within the Solar system, the largest pair of bodies by far are the Sun and Jupiter. The bodies trapped at the Lagrangian points of that system could be fairly large and yet remain negligible in mass in comparison to Jupiter.

The situation with respect to Saturn would be far less favorable. Since Saturn is smaller than Jupiter, the asteroids at the Trojan position associated with Saturn would be smaller on the average. They would be twice as far from us as those of Jupiter are so that they would also be dimmer. They would thus be very difficult to see and the fact of

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the matter is that no Saturnian Trojans have been found. The case is even worse for Uranus, Neptune and Pluto.

As for the small inner planets, there any rubble in the Trojan position must consist of small objects indeed. That alone would make them nearly impossible to see, even if they existed and, in addition, particularly in the case of Venus and Mercury, they would be lost in the glare of the sun.

In fact, astronomers do not really expect to find the equivalent of Trojan asteroids for any planet of the Solar system other than Jupiter until such time as an astronomical laboratory is set up outside the Earth or, better yet, until spaceships actually explore the various Lagrangian points.

Yet there is one exception to this; one place where observation from the Earth's surface can turn something up and, in fact, may have done so. That is a Lagrangian point that is not associated with a sun-planet system, but with a planet-satellite system. Undoubtedly, you are ahead of me and know that I am referring to the Earth and the Moon.

The fact that the Earth has a single satellite was known as soon as man grew intelligent enough to become a purposeful observer. Modern man with all his instruments has never been able to find a second one. Not a natural one, anyway. In fact, astronomers are quite certain that, other than the Moon itself, no body of more than, say, half a mile in diameter, revolves about the Earth.

This does not preclude the presence of any number of very small particles and data brought back by artificial satellites would seem to indicate that the Earth is surrounded by a ring of dust particles something after the fashion of Saturn, though on a much more tenuous scale.

Visual observation could not detect such a ring except in places where the particles might be concentrated to unusually high densities. The only spots where the concentration could be great enough would be at the Lagrangian points, L_4 and L_5, of the Earth-Moon system. (Since the Earth is more than 25.8 times as massive as the moon—it is 81 times as massive in point of fact—objects at those points would occupy a stable position.)

Sure enough, in 1961, a Polish astronomer, K. Kordylewski, has reported actually spotting two very faintly luminous patches in these positions. Presumably, they represent dust clouds trapped there.

And in connection with these "cloud satellites," I have thought up a practical application of Lagrangian points which, as far as I know, is original with me.

As we all know, one of the great problems brought upon us by the

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technology of the space age is that of the disposal of radioactive wastes. Many solutions have been tried or have been suggested. The wastes are sealed in strong containers or, as is suggested, fused in glass. They may be buried underground, stored in salt-mines or dropped into the abyss.

No solution, however, is wholly satisfactory which leaves the radioactivity upon the Earth, so some bold souls have suggested that, eventually, measures will be taken to fire the wastes into space.

The safest procedure one can possibly imagine is to shoot these wastes into the Sun. This, however, is not an easy thing to do at all (see "Of Capture and Escape," F&SF, May 1959). It would take less energy to shoot them to the Moon, but I'm sure that astronomers would veto that. It would be still easier simply to shoot them into an orbit about the Sun and easiest of all to shoot them into an orbit about the Earth.

In either of these latter cases, however, we run the risk, in the long run, of cluttering up the inner portions of the Solar system, and particularly the neigborhood of Earth, with gobs of radioactive material. We would be living in the midst of our own refuse, so to speak.

Now granted that space is large and that the refuse, in comparison, is small, so that collisions or near-collisions between spaceships and radioactive debri would be highly improbable, it could still lead to trouble in the long run.

Consider the analogy of our atmosphere. All through history, man as freely poured gaseous wastes and smoky particles into it in the certainty that all would be diluted far past harm; yet air pollution has now become a major problem. Well, let's not pollute space.

One way out is to concentrate our wastes into one small portion of space and make sure it stays there. Those regions of space can then be marked off-limits and everything else will be free of trouble.

To do this, one would have to fire the wastes to one or the other of the Trojan positions associated with the Earth-Moon system in such a way as to leave it trapped there. Properly done, the wastes would remain at those points, a quarter-million miles from the Moon and a quarter-million miles from the Earth, for indefinite periods, certainly long enough for the radiation to die down to non-dangerous levels.

Naturally, the areas would be a death trap for any ship passing through; a kind of "Trojan hearse" in fact. Still, it would be a small price to pay for solving the radioactive ash disposal problem, just as this pun is a small price to pay for giving me a title for the article.

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BOOKS

ABOMINABLE SNOWMEN: LEGEND COME TO LIFE, Ivan T. Sanderson, Chilton, $7.50

A HOLE IN THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA, Willard Bascom, Doubleday, $4.95

THE MYSTERIOUS SEA, Lester del Rey, Chilton, $2.95

6 X H, Robert A. Heinlein, Pyramid, 35¢

GREENER THAN YOU THINK, Ward Moore, Ballantine, 35¢

THE CLOCK STRIKES 12, H. R. Wakefield, Ballantine, 35¢

LETTRES DE CACHET

We confess that like most people we cultivate the Mysterious and the Unknown, and have never quite been able to stop hoping that the "Lost World" will someday be found in the vastness of unexplored South America. We also would like to believe that the Abominable Snowman exists.

Ivan T. Sanderson's ABOMINABLE SNOWMEN has devoted 500 pages to the destruction of that belief through the very effort to foster it. He begins with a dispassionate discussion, profusely illustrated with diagrams and drawings, of the legends, folkways, myths and rumors that went to create the story of the AS. He analyses evidence: snowtracks, frozen remains, anatomical samples, faeces, blood tests, etc. This is a little diffuse, but excellent, and makes fascinating reading.

But when he comes to the lost evidence and the unexplained evidence suggesting the existence of the AS, he breaks our heart; for this turns out to be of the you-have-to-prove-it-isn't-true-before-I'll-believe-it-isn't-so order. The request to prove a negative is one of the first signs of the crank. Mr. Sanderson claims there is evidence of the existence of the *Oh-Mah*, or Abominable Snowman, just waiting to be collected, but people obstinately refuse to do this. Therefore, the AS exists.

Mr. Sanderson dislikes sceptics.

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He writes: *Most of the sceptics are actually crackpots, yakking away in a vacuum of 'make-believe. They do not have the facts; they often don't even read or examine them; they are not trained to interpret them; and they have preconceived notions, often on everything. Moreover, these are usually quite erroneous, even deliberately so.* This sounds like the pot calling the kettle black.

It also sounds very much like the followers of Charles Fort, from which society dear God deliver us! Consequently, we regretfully abandon all belief in the Abominable Snowman for fear of being associated with the types who do. If you are one of these, by all means buy ABOMINABLE SNOWMEN. If you're not, buy it anyway; it will enable you to see how the other half thinks.

A HOLE IN THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA by Willard Bascom, is an informative, almost definitive, discussion of the Mohole Project. We had known about this only vaguely[1], so we were gratified to learn that the "Moho" is named in honor of Professor Andrija Mohorovicic, that it is a seismic discontinuity in the earth's crust at a depth of 55 kilometers, and that it has been the dream of geologists to drill a hole in the ocean floor, through the layers of sediment, basalt, deep crust and the Moho transitional zone into the earth's mantle.

It is hoped that core samples can be brought up from every layer, and it is believed that careful analysis will cast enormous light on the past, present, and future of the earth. In fact geologists insist that the money now being spent on space projects could be spent far more profitably on Mohole projects.

Mr. Bascom's book, splendidly illustrated, explores every aspect of this project, including geology, stratigraphy, radioactive dating, seismic surveying, oceanography, magnetism, heat and pressure, and modern oil-well drilling. His writing style is a bit pedestrian, but his material is so captivating that this book is an absolute must.

THE MYSTERIOUS SEA by Lester del Rey is a popular science book, admirably suited to youngsters who want clear answers to interesting questions presented in an engaging manner. There is no aspect of the sea that Mr. del Rey does not discuss with lucid enthusiasm: its origins, scientific tests to reveal the origin of life, plankton, skin-diving, the intelligence of dolphins, the Mohole, tides, corals, monsters, eels, oceanic rivers,

[1] *A degree of ignorance shared, no doubt, with others who unfortunately happened to be abroad, or were occupied with other matters of extreme emergency when F&SF's July issue, containing Dr. Asimov's "Recipe for a Planet," appeared.*

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seamounts, searifts . . . the list is endless. And in his passages on Scuba diving, Mr. del Rey casually drops a delightful story idea. We wonder which authors will pick it up.

It really is amazing how powerfully Robert Heinlein has influenced the field of fantasy and science fiction. Although this department was not aware of the authorship of some of the six stories included in 6 X H when we read them originally, we never forgot the themes. So it came as a delightful surprise when we realized that that one about the people who came through the mirrors ("The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag") and that one about the pet whirlwind ("Our Fair City") and that one about the fourth dimensional house ("And He Built a Crooked House") had all been written by Heinlein.

Also included are "They," Heinlein's wonderful extrapolation of the paranoia theme, "The Man Who Traveled in Elephants," and "All You Zombies," perhaps the ultimate working out of the time paradox. The stories date from 1941 through 1959, and we suggest that you read them in chronological order. It's a lesson in writing technique to see how Mr. Heinlein's style became crisper and more mature.

Every few years an author comes up with another blight that threatens the world; fog, rust, yeast, etc. In GREENER THAN YOU THINK it's devilgrass, which presently infuritates California gardeners, and in Mr. Moore's novel infests the entire world. It is a savage variety, a mutation resulting from a "Metamorphizer" invented by Josephine Spencer Francis to improve food crops. It resists all efforts to stem it, defying sharpened steel, fire, chemicals, and explosives.

Mr. Moore, author of BRING THE JUBILEE, writes in a free, entertaining style, with a definite bias for farce characterizations and situations. GREENER THAN YOU THINK is not a classic in the same class with BRING THE JUBILEE, but it's nice to have it reprinted, and you will enjoy reading it for the first time, or rereading it.

THE CLOCK STRIKES 12 is a mildly interesting collection of "macabre tales of the supernatural," it says on the cover. H. R. Wakefield writes in the English style which, quite frankly, often disappoints us. We've discussed the question with English authors and editors, but have never been able to find the answer. Why the devil do so many English writers persist in telegraphing their punches? Or, putting it another way, haven't they ever heard of misdirection? If you get a chance,

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read THE CLOCK STRIKES 12 and you'll see what we mean. Mr. Wakefield specializes in developments which you can see coming a mile away.

LETTRES DE CACHET, royal orders for imprisonment, is how we think of the mail we receive, consigning us to outer darkness and eternal punishment for various reasons. We would like to answer some of them in this department. We haven't the space to print the letters in full, so we'll merely quote the pertinent passages.

Why are you so lazy? Why don't you review all the s f books that come out? There are many books like that you never even talk about.

E.S.K., Baldwin, New York

We've mentioned before that we refuse to review the books we entirely dislike, unless they're by authors too important to ignore. There's no need for us to mention everything published; other splendid reviewers in other magazines perform this service. We feel our function is to attempt a bookish essay in each issue which will take the readers backstage in the authors' world and give them some understanding of the craft.

I have a story I'm willing to submit provided you promise to read it yourself, no secretaries. It is a significant theme about the sacred cow of psychoanalysis which you've always been afraid to touch. If you don't publish it I'll sell it somewhere else.

L.S.A. Santa Monica, Cal.

Send your MS to Mr. Mills, the editor; we're merely the book reviewer. Enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for return. Do not include challenging, disputatious, or explanatory notes. Your story must speak for itself. If it has something to say, it will most assuredly be bought. We wish some professional authors would realize that.

Why are you always so mad at other writers? You should be friends.

B.B., Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

The editor has informed us that we are rather crotchety, which revelation came as a considerable surprise. We had thought we were being honest, judgmatical, and no more severe with other authors than we are with ourself. We love the writing craft too deeply to smear it with honey. Certainly we're not "mad at other writers;" only bad writers.

But if what you and the editor say is true, all we can hope is that we're consistently crotchety. At least everyone will receive the same treatment, and know how much bad temper to discount.

If you hate scientifiction so much why do you write about it?

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Why don't you quit and make room for somebody who appreciates STF do the writing?

R.B.L., Akron, Ohio

Visitors to the States, from Mrs. Trollope on, have noted the extreme sensitivity of Americans to criticism, which they always equate with dislike. The fact that we criticize science fiction and its authors does not mean that we hate it; quite the reverse, we like it so much that we feel strongly.

We find ourself in a difficult position. The very authors and fans who complain bitterly that science fiction is not accepted as a part of mainstream literature, complain even more bitterly when we criticize science fiction by mainstream literary standards. This, indeed, is what we attempt to do, and will continue to do. For us, science fiction is literature, and must be written as literature and judged as literature. No special pleading will be allowed.

—Alfred Bester

COMMUNICATE

Here is a charming and happy example of successful communication. In the July, 1961 issue of F&SF Market Place we ran this ad

PERSONAL

Scientific—Young man, 29, likes Physics and Electronics, seeks the Right Girl. She must like science, be kind, sincere, home loving. Box 271F, Rockville Centre, N.Y.

A few months later when we wrote suggesting a repeat of the ad, the happy young man wrote: "I have just married a girl who answered my ad asking for a 'scientific home-loving girl' so I will not need to place the ad again. She is everything that I hoped for, and I would never have met her without your help. We are tremendously grateful. . . ." What a nice, warm glow this gave us.

Do you have a personal, or professional, or business offer of interest to the 168,000* men and women who read F&SF? Communicate it through the columns of F&SF Market Place. See page 130.

**Each of the 56,000 copies we sell each month is read by three people—one-third of them women.*

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A book editor of our acquaintance (nameless here for obvious reasons) recently mentioned to us that he had been thinking wistfully about the desirability of a year's moratorium in the world of publishing—it would give readers everywhere at least a token chance to catch up on the already published worthwhile books they would not otherwise have time for if they were keeping up with the unremitting assault of important new work. That, of course, is fantasy; the following strikes us as solid science fiction—thoughtful, hardly arguable extrapolation . . . susceptible of being considered, if you carelessly like, as humor.

MS FND IN A LBRY: or, The Day Civilization Collapsed

by Hal Draper

From: *Report of the Commander, Seventh Expeditionary Force, Andromedan Paleoanthropological Mission*

. . . What puzzled our research teams was the suddenness of collapse, and the speed of reversion to barbarism, in this multi-galactic civilization of the biped race. Obvious causes like war, destruction, plague, or invasion were speedily eliminated. Now the outlines of the picture emerge, the answer makes me apprehensive.

Part of the story is quite similar to ours, according to those who know our own prehistory well.

On the mother planet there are early traces of *books*. This word denotes paleoliterary records of knowledge in representational and macroscopic form. Of course, these disappeared very early, perhaps 175,000 of our yukals ago, when their increase threatened to leave no place on the planet's surface for anything else.

First they were reduced to *micros*, and then to *supermicros*,

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which were read with the primeval electronic microscopes then extant. But in another yukal the old problem was back, aggravated by colonization on most of the other planets of the local solar system, all of which were producing *books* in torrents. At about this time, too, their cumbersome alphabet was reduced to mainly consonantal elements (thus: *thr cmbrsm alfbt w rdsd t mnl cnsntl elmnts*) but this was done to facilitate quick reading, and only incidentally did it cut down the mass of *Bx* (the new spelling) by a full third. A drop out of the bucket.

Next step was the elimination of the multitude of separate Bx depositories in favor of a single building for the whole civilization. Every home on every inhabited planet had a farraginous diffuser which tuned in on any of the Bx at will. This cut the number to about one millionth at a stroke, and the wise men of the species congratulated themselves that the problem was solved.

This building, 25 miles square and two miles high, was buried in one of the oceans to save land surface for parking space, and so our etymological team is fairly sure that the archaic term liebury (lbry) dates from this period. Within no more than 22 yukals, story after story had been added till it extended a hundred miles into the stratosphere. At this level, cosmic radiation defarraginated the scanning diffusers, and it was realized that another limit had been reached. Proposals were made to extend the liebury laterally, but it was calculated that in three yukals of expansion so much of the ocean would be thus displaced that the level of the water would rise ten feet and flood the coastal cities. Another scheme was worked out to burrow deeper into the ocean bottom, until eventually the liebury would extend right through the planet like a skewer through shashlik (a provincial Plutonian delicacy), but it was realized in time that this would be only a momentary palliative.

The fundamental advance, at least in principle, came when the representational records were abandoned altogether in favor of *punched supermicros,* in which the supermicroscopic elements were the punches themselves. This began the epoch of abstract recs—or Rx, to use the modern term.

The great breakthrough came when Mcglcdy finally invented mass-produced *punched molecules* (of any substance). The mass of Rx began shrinking instead of expanding. Then Gldbg proved what had already been suspected: knowledge was not infinite, and the civilization was asymptotically approaching its limits; the flood was leveling off. The Rx storage problem was hit another body-blow two generations later when Kwlsk used the Mcglcdy principle

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to develop the *notched electron,* made available for use by the new retinogravitic activators. In the ensuing ten yukals a series of triumphant developments wiped the problem out for good, it seemed:

(1) Getting below matter level, Shmt began by notching quanta (an obvious extension of Kwlsk's work) but found this clumsy. In a brilliant stroke he invented the *chipped quantum,* with an astronomical number of chips on each one. The Rx contracted to one building for the whole culture.

(2) Shmt's pupil Qjt, even before the master's death, found the chip unnecessary. Out of his work, ably supported by Drnt and Lccn, came the *nudged quanta,* popularly so called because a permanent record was impressed on each quantum by a simple vectorial pressure, occupying no subspace on the pseudosurface itself. A whole treatise could be nudged onto a couple of quanta, and whole branches of knowledge could for the first time be put in a nutshell. The Rx dwindled to one room of one building.

(3) Finally—but this took another yukal and was technologically associated with the expansion of the civilization to intergalactic proportions—Fx and Sng found that quanta in hyperbolic tensor systems could be tensed into occupying the same spatial and temporal coordinates, if properly pizzicated. In no time at all, a quantic pizzicator was devised to compress the nudged quanta into overlapping spaces, most of these being arranged in the wide-open areas lying between the outer electrons and the nucleus of the atom, leaving the latter free for tables of contents, illustrations, graphs, etc.

All the Rx ever produced could now be packed away in a single drawer, with plenty of room for additions. A great celebration was held when the Rx drawer was ceremoniously installed, and glowing speeches pointed out that science had once more refuted pessimistic croakings of doom. Even so, two speakers could not refrain from mentioning certain misgivings . . .

To understand the nature of these misgivings, we must now turn to a development which we have deliberately ignored so far for the sake of simplicity but which was in fact going on side by side with the shrinking of the Rx.

First, as we well know, the Rx in the new storage systems could be scanned only by activating the nudged or pizzicated quanta, etc. by means of a code number, arranged as an index to the Rx. Clearly the index itself had to be kept representational and macroscopic, else a code number would become necessary to activate *it.* Or so it was assumed.

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Secondly, a process came into play of which even the ancients had had presentiments. According to a tradition recorded by Kchv among some oldsters in the remote Los Angeles swamps, the thing started when an antique sage produced one of the paleoliterary Bx entitled *An Index to Indexes* (or *Ix t Ix*), coded as a primitive I^2. By the time of the supermicros there were several Indexes to Indexes to Indexes (I^3), and work had already started on an I^4.

These were the innocent days before the problem became acute. Later, Index runs were collected in Files, and Files in Catalogs—so that, for example, $C^3F^5I^4$ meant that you wanted an Index to Indexes to Indexes to Indexes which was to be found in a certain File of Files of Files of Files of Files, which in turn was contained in a Catalog of Catalogs of Catalogs. Of course, actual numbers were much greater. This structure grew exponentially. The process of education consisted solely in learning how to tap the Rx for knowledge when needed. The position was well put indeed in a famous speech by Jzbl to the graduates of the Central Saturnian University, when he said that it was a source of great pride to him that although hardly anybody knew anything any longer, everybody now knew how to find out everything.

Another type of Index, the Bibliography, also flourished, side by side with the C-F-I series of the Ix. This B series was the province of an aristocracy of scholars who devoted themselves exclusively to Bibliographies of Bibliographies of . . . well, at the point in history with which we are next concerned, the series had reached B^{437}. Furthermore, at every exponential level, some ambitious scholar branched off to work on a History of the Bibliographies of that level. The compilation of the first History of Bibliography (H^1) is lost in the mists of time, but there is an early chronicled account of a History of Bibliographies of Bibliographies of Bibliographies (H^3) and naturally H^{436} was itself under way about the time B^{437} was completed.

On the other hand, the first History of Histories of Bibliographies came much later, and this H-prime series always lagged behind. It goes without saying that the B-H-H' series (like the C-F-I series) had to have its own indexes, which in turn normally grew into a C-F-I series ancillary to the B-H-H' series. There were some other but minor developments of the sort.

All these Index records were representational; though proposals were made at times to reduce the whole thing to pizzicated quanta, reluctance to take this fateful step long won out. So when the Rx had already shrunk to

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room-size, the Ix were expanding to fill far more than the space saved. The old liebury was bursting. One of the asteroids was converted into an annex, called the Asteroidal Storage Station. In thirteen yukals, all the ASS's were filled in the original solar system. Other systems selfishly refused to admit the camel's nose into their tent.

Under the stress of need, resistance to abstractionizing broke, and with the aid of the then new process of cospatial nudging, the entire mass of Ix was nudged into a drawer no bigger than that which contained the Rx themselves.

Now this drawer (D^1 had to be activated by indexed code numbers, itself. More and more scholars turned away from research in the thinner and thinner stream of discoverable knowledge in order to tackle the far more serious problem: how to thread one's way from the Ix to the Rx. This specialization led to a whole new branch of knowledge known as Ariadnology. Naturally, as Ariadnology expanded its Rx, its Ix swelled proportionately, until it became necessary to set up a subbranch to systematize access from the Ix to the Rx of Ariadnology itself. This (the Ariadnology of Ariadnology) was known as A^2, and by the time of the Collapse the field of A^5 was just beginning to develop, together with its appropriate Ix, plus the indispensable B-H-H′ series, of course.

The inevitable happened in the course of a few yukals: the Ix of the second code series began to accumulate in the same ASS's that had once been so joyfully emptied. Soon these Ix were duly abstractionized into a second drawer, D^2.

Then it was the old familiar story: the liebury filled up, the ASS's filled up. Around 10,000 yukals ago, the first artificial planet was created, therefore, to hold the steadily mounting agglomeration of Ix drawers. About 8000 yukals ago, a number of artificial planets were united into pseudosolar systems for convenience. By the time of yukal 2738 of our own era (for we are now getting into modern times), the artificial pseudosolar systems were due to be amalgamated into a pseudogalaxy of drawers, when—

The Catastrophe struck. . . .

This tragic story can be told with some historical detail, thanks to the work of our research teams.

It began with what seemed a routine breakdown in one of the access lines from $D^{57\times103}$ to $D^{42\times107}$. A Bibliothecal Mechanic set out to fix it as usual. It did not fix. He realized that a classification error must have been made by the ariadnologist who had worked on the last pseudosolar system. Tracing the misnudged quanta involved, he ran into:

"See $C^{11}F^{73}I^{15}$."

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Laboriously tracing through, he found the note:

"This Ix class has been replaced by $C^{32}F^{7}I^{10}$ for brachygravitic endo-ranganathans and $C^{22}F^{64}I^{3}$ for ailurophenolphthaleinic exo-*ranganathans.*"

Tracing this through in turn, he found that they led back to the original $C^{11}F^{73}I^{15}$!

At this point he called in the district Bibliothecal Technician, who pointed out that the misnudged sequence could be restored only by reference to the original Rx. Through the area Bibliothecal Engineer, an emergency message was sent to the chief himself, Mlvl Dwy Smth.

Without hesitation, His Bibliothecal Excellency pressed the master button on his desk and queried the Ix System for: "Knowledge, Universal—All Rx-Drawer, *Location of.*"

To his stunned surprise, the answer came back: "See also $C^{11}F^{73}I^{15}$."

Frantically he turned dials, nudged quanta, etc. but it was no use. Somewhere in the galaxy-size flood of Ix drawers was the one and only drawer of Rx, the one that had once been installed with great joy. It was somewhere among the Indexes, Bibliographies, Bibliographies of Bibliographies, Histories of Bibliography, Histories of Histories of Bibliographies, etc.

A desperate physical search was started, but it did not get very far, breaking down when it was found that no communication was possible in the first place without reference to the knowledge stored in the Rx. As the entire bibliothecal staff was diverted for the emergency, breakdowns in the access lines multiplied and tangled, until whole sectors were disabled, rendering further cooperation even less possible. The fabric of this biped civilization started falling apart.

The final result you know from my first report. Rehabilitation plans will be sent tomorrow.

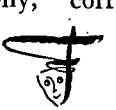
Yours

Yrlh Vvg
Commander

(*Handwritten memo*) This report received L-43-102. File it under $M^{42}A^{8}E^{39}$. —T.G.

(*Handwritten memo*) You must be mistaken; there is no $M^{42}A^{8}E^{39}$. Replaced by *W-$M^{23}A^{72}E^{30}$ for duodenomattoid reports. —L.N.

(*Handwritten memo*) You damfool, you bungled again. Now you've got to refer to the Rx to straighten out the line. Here's the correction number, stupid:



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The last of a series of stories about the "hothouse" world of the far future, when plant-life takes over; human beings—the few who are left—are only five inches high, and Earth is approaching its end. . . .

EVERGREEN

by Brian W. Aldiss

I

ON A REMOTE MOUNTAINSIDE of Earth, a woman cradled her baby in her arms, singing to him though he slept.

The upper slopes of the mountain were bathed in the rays of an ever-setting sun, while the lower slopes were lost in night. This whole tumbled area of the twilight zone was one of darkness, lit occasionally by ruddy beacons where mountains thrust themselves up, in stony imitation of living things, to reach the light.

Even where darkness lay thickest, it was not absolute. Just as death is not absolute—the chemicals of life later reforming to create more life—so the darkness was often to be reckoned merely a lesser degree of light, a realm where lurked creatures that had been forced out of the brighter and more populous regions.

Among these exiles were the leatherfeathers, a pair of which skimmed over the mother's head, enjoying an acrobatic flight, storming downwards with their wings closed or spreading them to float upwards on a current of warmer air. The baby awoke and the mother pointed out the flying creatures.

"There they go, Laren, wheeee, down into the valley and—look, there they are!—back into the sun again, up so high".

Her baby wrinkled its nose, indulging her. The leathery fliers dived and turned, flashing in the light before they sank into a mesh of shadows, only to rise again as if out of a sea, sweeping upwards occasionally almost as far as the low canopy of cloud. The clouds held a bronze aura; they were as much a feature of the landscape as the mountains themselves—and almost as permanent.

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Often enough they released snow, sleet, or rain; but between times they reflected light over the obscure world below, scattering it from their contours like showers, until the barren countrysides were dappled with yellow and fugitive gold.

Amid this cross-hatching of brightness and dusk the leatherfeathers sped, feeding on the spores which even here floated thick, wafted from the vast propagating machine that covered the sunlit face of the planet. The infant Laren gurgled in delight, stretching out his hands; Yattmur the mother gurgled too, filled with pleasure at every movement of her child.

One of the fliers was diving steeply now. Yattmur watched with sudden surprise, noticing its lack of control. The leatherfeather twisted down, its mate winging powerfully after it. Just for a moment she thought it was going to straighten: then it struck the mountainside with an audible thwack!

Yattmur stood up. She could see the leatherfeather, a motionless heap above which the bereft mate fluttered.

She was not the only one who had observed the fatal dive. Further over on the hillside, one of the tummy-belly men began running towards the fallen bird, crying to his two companions as he went. She heard the words, "Come and look see with eyes the fallen bird of wings!", clear in the clear air, she heard the sound of his feet thudding on the ground as he trotted down the slope. Mother-like, she stood watching, clasping Laren and regretting any incident that disturbed her peace.

Something else was after the fallen bird. Yattmur glimpsed a group of figures further down the hill, coming rapidly from behind a spur of stone. Eight of them she counted, white-clad figures with pointed noses and large ears, outlined sharply against the deep blue gloom of a valley. They dragged a sleigh behind them.

She and Gren, her mate, had known of the existence of these savage mountain creatures since their arrival here on the back of a migratory stalker. They called them Mountainears, and kept a sharp watch for them, for the creatures were fast and well-armed, though they had never offered the humans any harm. They seemed a curious mixture of shyness and ferocity.

For a moment the tableau held: three tummy-belly men trotting downhill, eight mountainears moving up, and the one surviving bird wheeling overhead, uncertain whether to mourn or escape. The mountainears were armed with bows and arrows; Yattmur saw them, tiny but clear in the distance, lift their weapons, and suddenly she was full of anxi-

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ety for the three plump half-wits with whom she had travelled so far. Clutching Laren to her breast, she stood up and called to them.

"Hey, you tummies! Come back!"

Even as she called, the first fierce mountainear had unleashed his arrow. Swift and sure it went —and the surviving leatherfeather spiralled down. Beneath it, the leading tummy-belly ducked and squealed. The falling bird, its wings still faintly beating, hit him between the shoulder blades as it dropped. Staggering, he fell, while the bird flopped feebly about him.

The group of tummy-bellies and mountainears met.

Yattmur turned and ran. She burst into the smoky cave where she, Gren, and the baby lived.

"Gren! Please come! The tummy-bellies will be killed. They are out there with the terrible big-eared white ones attacking them. What can we do?"

Gren lay propped against a column of rock, his hands clasped together on his stomach. When Yattmur entered, he fixed her with a dead gaze, then dropped his eyes again. Pallor marked his features, contrasting with a rich liver-brown that glistened about his head and throat. A brain fungus grew there, adhering to his flesh, framing his face with its sticky folds.

"Are you going to *do* anything?" she demanded. "What is the matter with you these days?"

"The tummy-bellies are useless to us," Gren said. Nevertheless, he stood up. She put out her hand, which he clutched listlessly, and dragged him to the cave mouth.

"I've grown fond of the poor creatures," she said, almost to herself.

They peered down the steep slopes to where figures moved against a backdrop of hazy shadow.

The three tummy-belly men were walking back up the hill, dragging one of the dead leatherfeathers with them. Beside them walked the mountainears, pulling their sleigh, on the top of which lay the other leatherfeather. The two groups went amicably together, chattering, with plentiful gesticulation from the tummy-bellies.

"Well, what do you make of that!" Yattmur exclaimed.

It made an odd procession. The mountainears in profile were sharp-snouted; they moved in an irregular fashion, sometimes dropping forward to pace on all fours up the incline. Their language came to Yattmur in short barks of sound, though they were too far away for her to distinguish what was being said—even provided that what they said was intelligible.

"What do you make of it, Gren?" she asked.

He said nothing, staring out at

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the little crowd that was now clearly heading for the cave in which he had directed the tummy-bellies to live. As they passed beyond the stalker grove, he saw them point in his direction and laugh. He made no sign.

Yattmur looked up at him, suddenly struck with pity at the change that had recently possessed him.

"You say so little and you look so ill. We have come so far together, you and I with only each other to love, yet now it is as if you were gone from me. From my heart flows only love for you, from my lips only kindness. But love and kindness are lost things on you now, O Gren, O my Gren!"

She put her free arm round him, only to feel him move away. Yet he said, as if the words came packaged one by one in ice, "Help me, Yattmur. Be patient. I am ill."

Now she was half-preoccupied with the other matter.

"You'll be better. But what are those savage mountainears doing? Can they be friendly?"

"You'd better go and see," Gren said, still in his bleak voice. He disengaged her hand, went back inside the cave and lay down, resuming his former position with his hands clasped over his stomach. Yattmur sat down at the cave mouth, undecided. The tummy-bellies and mountainears had disappeared into the other cave. The girl stayed helplessly where she was, while clouds piled up overhead. Presently it began to rain, the rain turning to snow. Laren cried and was given a breast to suck.

Slowly the girl's thoughts grew outwards, eclipsing the rain. Vague pictures hung in the air about her, pictures that despite their lack of logic were her way of reasoning. Her safe days in a tribe of herders was represented by a tiny red flower that could also, with just the tiniest shift of emphasis, be her, for her safe days had been her: she had not seen herself as a phenomenon distinct from the phenomena about her. And when she tried to do so now, she could only picture herself distantly, in a crowd of bodies, or as part of a dance, or as a girl whose turn it was to take the buckets to Long Water.

Now the red flower days were over, except that a new bud put forth petals at her breast. The crowd of bodies had gone, and vanished with it was the yellow shawl symbol. The lovely shawl! Perpetual sun overhead like a hot bath, innocent limbs, a happiness that did not know itself—these were the strands of the yellow shawl she pictured. Distinctly she saw herself throw it away to follow the wanderer whose merit was that he was the unknown.

The unknown was a big withered leaf in which something crouched. She had followed the

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leaf—the tiny figure of herself grew nearer and somehow more spikey—while shawl and red petals blew merrily off in the one way wind of time. Now the leaf turned flesh, rolling with her. She became a big figure, swarming with traffic. And in the red flower had been no music like the music of the leaf.

Yet it all faded. The mountain came marching in. Mountain and flower were opposed. Mountain rolled on for ever, in one steep slope that had no bottom or top, though the base rested in black mist and the peak in black cloud. Black mist and cloud were reaching everywhere through her reverie, shorthand for evil; while by another of those tiny shifts of emphasis, the slope became not just her present life, but all her life. In the mind are no paradoxes, only moments; and in the moment of the slope, all the bright flowers and shawls and flesh were as if they had never been.

Thunder snored over the real mountain, rousing Yattmur from her reverie, scattering her pictures.

She looked back into the cave at Gren. He was unmoving. He did not look at her. Her daydreaming brought her the comprehension she sought, and she told herself, "It is the magic morel that has brought us this trouble. Laren and I are victims of it as much as poor Gren. Because it preys on him, he is ill. It is on his head and in his head."

Comprehension was not the same as comfort. For all the help he was, she might have been absolutely alone on the huge chest of a mountain that slept its long sleep of stone. Gathering up the baby, she stood up.

"I'm going to the cave of the tummy-bellies," she said, half-expecting to get no reply.

Gren answered her.

"You cannot take Laren through that pouring rain. Give him to me and I will take care of him."

She crossed the floor towards him. Though the light was bad, she thought the fungus in his hair and round his neck looked darker than before. Certainly it was expanding, standing out over his forehead in a way it had never done. Sudden revulsion checked her movement as she began to offer him the baby.

He glanced up at her from under the morel with a look she could not recognise as his; it held that fatal mixture of stupidity and cunning lurking at the bottom of all evil. Instinctively, she jerked her child back.

"Give him to me. He won't be hurt," Gren said. "A young human could be taught so much."

Though his movements were generally so lethargic, he jumped up now with all swiftness. She leapt away angrily, hissing at him, drawing her knife, afraid in all her fibres. She showed him her teeth like an animal.

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"Keep away!"

Laren sent out an irritable wail.

"Give me the baby," Gren said again.

"You are not yourself. I'm frightened of you, Gren. Sit down again! Stay away! Stay away!"

Still he came forward, in a curiously slack way as if his nervous system was having to respond to two rival centres of control. She raised her knife, but he took absolutely no notice of it. In his eyes hung a blind look like a curtain.

At the last moment, Yattmur broke. Dropping her knife, she turned and sprinted from the cave.

Thunder came tumbling down the hill at her. Lightning sizzled, striking one strand of a great traverser web that stretched from nearby up into the clouds. The strand sluttered and flared until rain quenched it. Yattmur ran, making for the cave of the tummy-bellies, not daring to glance back.

Only when she reached it did she realise how unsure she was of her reception. By then it was too late to hesitate. As she burst in out of the rain, tummy-bellies and mountainears jumped up to meet her.

II

Gren sank to his hands and knees among the painful stones at the mouth of the cave.

Complete chaos had overtaken his impressions of the external world. Pictures rose like steam, twisting in his inner mind. He saw a wall of tiny cells, sticky like a honeycomb, growing all about him. Though he had a thousand hands, they did not push down the wall; they came away thick with syrup that bogged his movements. Now the wall of cells loomed above his head, closing him in. Only one gap in it remained. Staring through it, he saw tiny figures miles distant. One was Yattmur, down on her knees, gesticulating, crying because he could not get to her. Other figures he made out to be the tummy-bellies. Another he recognised as Lily-yo, the leader of the old group to which he had once belonged. And another—that writhing creature!—he recognised as himself, shut out from his own citadel.

The mirage fogged over and vanished.

Miserably, he fell back against the wall, and the cell of the wall began popping open like wombs, oozing poisonous things.

The poisonous things became mouths, lustrous brown mouths that excreted syllables. They impinged on him with the voice of the morel. They came so thickly on him from all sides that for a while it was only their shock and not their meaning that struck him. He screamed creakingly, until he realised the morel was speaking

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not with cruelty but regret; whereupon he tried to control his shivering and listen to what was being said.

"There were no creatures like you in the thickets of Nomansland where my kind live," the morel pronounced. "Our role was to live off the simple vegetable creatures there. They existed without brain; we were their brains. With you it has been different. In the extraordinary ancestral compost heap of your unconscious mind, I have burrowed too long.

"I have seen so much to amaze me in you that I forgot what I should have been about. You have captured me, Gren, as surely as I have captured you.

"Yet the time has come when I must remember my true nature. Though I have been unable to control you as I once hoped, I have fed on your life to feed my own. That is my function, my only way. Now I reach a point of crisis, for I am *ripe*."

"I don't understand," Gren said dully.

"A decision lies before me. I am soon to divide and sporulate; that is the system by which I reproduce, and I have little control over it. This I could do here, hoping that my progeny would survive somehow on this bleak mountain against rain and ice and snow. Or . . . I could transfer to a fresh host."

"Not to my baby."

"Why not to your baby? Laren is the only choice for me. He is young and fresh; he will be far easier to control than you are. True, he is weak as yet, but Yattmur and you will look after him until he becomes able to look after himself."

"Not if it means looking after you as well."

Before Gren finished speaking he received a blow, scattering directly over his brain, that sent him huddling against the cave wall in pain.

"You and Yattmur will not desert the baby under any circumstances. You know that, and I see it in your thought. You know also that if any opportunity came you would get away from these barren miserable slopes to the fertile lands of light. That also fits in with my plan. Time presses, man; I must move according to my needs.

"Knowing every fibre of you as I do, I pity your pain—but it can mean nothing at all to me when set against my own nature. I must have an able and preferably witless host that will carry me rapidly back into the sunlit world, so that I can seed there. So I have chosen Laren. That would be the best course for my progeny, don't you think?"

"I'm dying," Gren moaned.

"Not yet," twanged the morel.

At the back of the tummy-belly

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cave sat Yattmur, half-asleep. The foetid air of the place, the yammer of voices, the noise of the rain outside, all combined to dull her senses. She dozed, and Laren slept on a pile of dead foliage beside her. They had all eaten scorched leatherfeather, half-cooked, half-burnt over a blazing fire. Even the baby had accepted tidbits.

When she appeared distraught at the cave entrance, the tummy-bellies had welcomed her in, crying, "Come, lovely sandwich lady, out of the raining wetness where the clouds fall. Come in with us to cuddle and make warmth without water."

"Who are these others with you?" She looked anxiously at the eight mountainears, grinning and jumping at the sight of her.

Seen close to, they were very formidable: a head taller than the humans, with thick shoulders on which long fur stood out like a mantle. They had grouped together behind the tummy-bellies, but now began circling Yattmur, showing their teeth and calling to each other in a weird perversion of speech.

Their faces were the most fearsome Yattmur had ever seen. Long-jawed, low-browed, they had snouts and brief yellow beards, while their ears curled out of fuzzy short fur like segments of raw flesh. Quick and irritable in movement, they seemed never to leave their faces in repose: bars of long, sharp ivories appeared and disappeared behind grey lips as they snapped out questions at her.

"You yap you live here? On the Big Slope you yakker-yakker live? With the tummy-bellies, with the tummy-bellies live? You and them together, yipper-ya, slap-sleeping running living loving on the Big Big Slope?"

One of the largest mountainears asked Yattmur this rapid fire of questions, jumping before her and grimacing as he did so. His voice was so coarse and guttural, his phrases so chopped into barks, that she had difficulty in understanding him at all. "Yipper yapper yes live you on Big Black Slope?"

"Yes, I live on this mountain," she said, standing her ground. "Where do you live? What people are you?"

For answer he opened his goat eyes at her until a red brink of gristle showed all around them. Then he closed them tight, opened his cavernous jaws and emitted a high clucking soprano chord of laughter.

"These sharp-fur people are gods, lovely sharp gods, sandwich lady," the tummy-bellies explained, the three of them hopping before her, jostling each other in an agony to be first to unburden their souls to her. "These sharp-fur people are called sharp-furs. They are our gods, missis, for

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they run all over the Big Slope mountain, to be gods for dear old tummy-belly men. They are gods, gods, they are big fierce gods, sandwich lady. They have *tails!*"

This last sentence was delivered in a cry of triumph. The whole mob of them went streaming round the cave, shrieking and whooping. Indeed the sharp-furs had tails, sticking out of their rumps at impudent angles. These the tummy-bellies chased, trying to pull and kiss them. As Yattmur shrank back, Laren, who had watched this rout for a moment wide-eyed, began to bawl at the top of his voice. The dancing figures imitated him, interposing shouts and chants of their own.

"Devil dance on the Big Slope, Big Slope, Teeth many teeth bite-tear-chew night or light on Big Slope. Tummy-belly men are singing for tails of sharp-fur gods. Many big bad things to sing about on the Bad Slope. Eat and bite and drink when rain comes raining. Ai, ai, ai-yah!"

Suddenly as they galloped by, one of the fiercest sharp-furs snatched Laren out of Yattmur's arms. She cried out—he was gone, whirled away with startlement on his small red face. The long-faced creatures tossed him from one to another, first high then low, almost striking the floor or nearly scraping the ceiling, barking with laughter at their game.

Outraged, Yattmur flung herself on the nearest sharp-fur. As she tore at his long white fur, she felt the muscles beneath it, rippling as the creature turned. A leathery grey hand flashed up, rammed two fingers up her nostrils, and pushed. Scissoring pain cut between her eyes. She fell back, her hands going up to her face, lost her footing, and sprawled on the ground. Instantly the sharp-fur was onto her. Almost as quickly, the other eight piled on as well.

This was Yattmur's saving. The sharp-furs began to fight among themselves and forgot her. She crawled away from them, rescuing Laren, who lay now drugged with surprise, perfectly unharmed on the ground. Sobbing with relief, she hugged him to her. He began at once to cry—but when she looked fearfully round, the sharp-furs had forgotten about her and the fight, and were preparing to cook the dead leather-feathers again.

"Oh don't have wet rain in the eyes, lovely sandwich lady," said the tummy-bellies, clustering round her, patting her clumsily, trying to stroke her hair. She was alarmed at their familiarity with her when Gren was not about, but she said in a low voice, "You were so afraid of Gren and me: why have you no fear of these terrible creatures? Do you not see how dangerous they are?"

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"Do you not see how these gods of sharp-fur have tails? Only tails that grow on people have people with tails to be gods to us poor tummy-belly men."

"They will kill you."

"They are our gods, so we make happiness to be killed only by gods with tails. Yes, they have sharp teeth and tails! Yes, and the teeth and tails are of a sharpness!"

"You are like children, and they are dangerous."

"Ai-ee, the sharp-fur gods wear danger in their mouth for teeth. Yet the teeth do not call us hard names like you and the brain man Gren."

As the tummy-bellies huddled round Yattmur, she peered over their hairy shoulders at the group of sharp-furs. Momentarily they were almost still, tearing up one of the leatherfeathers and cramming it into their mouths. At the same time, a large leathern flask passed between them; from this, with much squabbling, they gulped in turn. Yattmur observed that even among themselves they spoke a broken version of the tongue the tummy-bellies spoke.

"How long are they staying here for?" she asked.

"In the cave they stay often because they love us in the cave," one tummy-belly said, stroking her shoulder.

"They have visited you before?"

Those fat faces grinned at her.

"They come to see us before and again and again because they love lovely tummy-belly men. You and the hunter man Gren do not love lovely tummy-belly men, so we weep on the Big Slope. And the sharp-furs soon take us away to find a green mummy-tummy. Yep yep, sharp-furs take us."

"You are leaving us?"

"We go away from you to leave you on the cold and nasty dark Big Slope, where it is so big and dark, because the sharp gods take us to tiny green place with warm mummy-tummies where slopes cannot live."

In the heat and stink, and with Laren grizzling, she grew confused. She made them say it all again, which they did volubly, until their meaning was all too clear.

For a long while now, Gren had been unable to conceal his hatred for the spinelessness of the tummy-bellies. This dangerous new sharp-snouted race had offered to take them off the mountain and back to one of the fleshy trees which, growing by the rivers of the hothouse world, succoured and enslaved tummy-belly men. Yettmur knew instinctively that the long-toothed mountain-ears were not to be trusted, but it was impossible to make the tummy-bellies feel this. She saw that she and her child were soon to be left alone on the bleak mountain with Gren.

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Overcome by several varieties of wretchedness, she began to weep.

They clustered nearer, trying inadequately to comfort her, breathing in her face, patting her breasts, tickling her body, making faces at the baby. She was too miserable to protest.

"You come with us to the green world, lovely sandwich lady, to be again far from the huge Big Slope with us lovely chaps," they murmured. "We let you have lovely sleeps in with us."

Yattmur offered no resistance, and soon they left her alone in her corner. One of them returned later, bringing her a portion of scorched leatherfeather, which she ate.

While she chewed, she thought, "Gren will kill my baby with that fungus. So I must take a chance for Laren's sake, and leave when the tummy-bellies leave." Once the decision had been made, she felt happier, and sank into a doze.

She was wakened by Laren's crying. As she attended to him, she peered outside. It was as dark as she had ever known it. The rain had stopped temporarily; now thunder filled the air, as if it rolled between earth and packed cloud seeking escape. The tummy-bellies and sharp-furs slept together in an uncomfortable heap, undisturbed by the noise. Yattmur's head throbbed, and she thought, I'll never sleep in this rumpus. But a moment later, with Laren cuddled against her, her eyes were closed again.

The next time she was roused, it was by the sharp-furs. They were barking with excitement and scampering out of the cave.

Laren was sleeping. Leaving the child on a pile of dead foliage, Yattmur went to see what was happening. She drew back momentarily on coming face to face with the sharp-furs. To protect their heads from the rain—which was coming down again with full force—they were wearing helmets carved from the same sort of dried gourd that Yattmur used for cooking and washing in.

Holes had been cut in the gourds for their ears, eyes and snouts. But the gourds were too large for the furry heads they covered; they rolled from side to side with every movement, making the sharp-furs look like broken dolls. This, and the fact that the gourds had been clumsily smeared with various colours, gave the sharp-furs a grotesque air, from which the element of fear was not missing.

As Yattmur ran into the pouring rain, one of the creatures jumped forward with its nodding wooden head and barred her way.

"Yagrapper yow you stay sleeping in the sleeping cave, mother lady. Coming through the rap-yap-rain is coming bad things that we fellows have no like. So we bite

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and tear and bite. Brrr buff best you stay away yap yay from sight of our teeth."

She flinched from its clutch, hearing the drum of rain on its crude helmet mingle with its baffling mixture of growls, yaps, and words.

"Why should I not stay out here?" she asked. "Are you afraid of me? What is happening?

"Catchy-carry-kind come yum yap and catch you! Grrr, let him catch you!"

It pushed Yattmur and leaped away to join its mates. The helmeted creatures were leaping about over their sledge, quarrelling as they sorted out their bows and arrows. The tummy-belly trio stood close by, cuddling each other and pointing frantically along the slope.

The cause of all the excitement was a group of figures moving slowly towards Yattmur's party. At first, squinting through the downpour, she thought only two things were approaching; then they separated to reveal themselves as three—and for the life of her she could not make out what, in their oddity, they might be. But the sharp-furs knew what they were.

"Catchy-carry kind, catchy-carry kind! Killy catchy-carry kind!" they seemed to be calling, growing frenzied about it. But the trio advancing through the rain, for all their peculiarity, did not look menacing even to Yattmur. The sharp-furs, however, were leaping in the air in lust; one or two were already taking aim with their bows through the wavering curtains of rain.

"Stop! Don't hurt them, let them come!" Yattmur shouted. "They can't harm us."

"Catchy-carry kind! You you yap you keep quiet, lady, and be not any harm or take harm!" they called, unintelligible with excitement. One of them charged at her, head first, banging his gourd helmet against her shoulder. In fear of him she turned and ran, blindly at first and then with purpose.

She could not deal with the sharp-furs: but probably Gren and the morel could.

Squelching and splashing, she ran back to her own cave. Unthinkingly, Yattmur plunged right in.

Gren stood against the wall by the entrance, half-concealed. She was past him before she realised it, only turning as he began to bear down on her.

Helpless with shock, she screamed and screamed, her mouth sagging toothily wide at the sight of him.

The surface of the morel was black and pustular now—and it had slipped down so that it covered all his face. Only his eyes gleamed sickly in the midst of it as he jumped forward at her.

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III

She sank to her knees. It was all she could manage at the moment in the way of evasive action, so completely had the sight of that huge cancerous growth on Gren's shoulders unnerved her.

"Oh Gren!" she gasped weakly.

He bent and took her roughly by her hair. The physical pain of this cleared her mind; though she trembled like a hill under a landslide of emotion, her wits returned to her.

"Gren, the morel thing is killing you," she whispered.

"Where's the baby?" he demanded. Though his voice was muffled, it had too an additional remoteness, a twanging quality, that gave her one more item for alarm. "What have you done with the baby, Yattmur?"

Cringing, she said, "You don't speak like yourself any more, Gren. What's happening? You know I don't hate you—tell me what's happening, so that I can understand."

"Why have you not brought the baby?"

"You're not like Gren any more. You're—you're somehow the morel now, aren't you? You talk with his voice."

"Yattmur—*I need the baby.*"

Struggling to her feet though he still clasped her hair, she said, as steadily as possible, "Tell me what you want Laren for."

"The baby is mine and I need him. Where have you put him?"

She pointed to the gloomy recesses of the cave.

"Don't be silly, Gren. He's lying back there behind you, at the back of the cave, fast asleep."

Even as he looked, as his attention was diverted, she wrenched herself out of his grip, ducked under his arm, and ran. Squeaking with terror, she burst into the open.

Again the rain soused down onto her face, bringing her back to a world she had left—though that horrifying glimpse of Gren had seemed to last for ever—little more than a moment before. From where she stood, the hillside cut off that strange trio the sharp-furs had called the catchy-carry-kind, but the group about the sledge was clearly visible. It stood in a tableau, tummy-bellies and sharp-furs motionless, looking over towards her, diverted from their other business by her screams.

She ran over to them, glad for all their irrationality to be with them again. Only then did she look back.

Gren had followed her from the cave mouth and there had stopped. After pausing indecisively, he went back and disappeared. The sharp-furs muttered and chattered to themselves, evidently awed by what they had seen. Taking advantage of the sit-

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uation, Yattmur pointed back at Gren's cave and said, "Unless you obey me, that terrible mate of mine with the deadly sponge face will come and devour you all. Now, let these other people approach, and don't harm them until they offer us harm."

"Catchy-carry-kind no yap yap good!" they burst out.

"Do as I say or the sponge-face will devour you, ears and fur and all!"

The three slowly moving figures were nearer now. Two of them were human in outline, if very thin, though the weird biscuit light pervading everywhere made detail impossible to discern. The figure that most intrigued Yattmur was the one bringing up the rear. Though it walked on two legs, it differed considerably from its companions in being taller and seeming to have an enormous head. At times it appeared to have a second head below the first, to possess a tail, and to be walking with its hands clutched round its upper skull. But the deluge, as well as part-concealing it, gave it a shimmering halo of rebounding rain drops which defied vision.

To add to Yattmur's impatience, the odd trio now stopped. Although she called to them to come on, they ignored her. They stood perfectly still on the flooded hillside—and gradually one of the human figures blurred round the edges, became translucent, disappeared!

Both tummy-bellies and sharp-furs, obviously impressed, set up a subdued murmur at this, although the latter showed little surprise.

"What's going on over there?" Yattmur asked one of the tummy-bellies.

"Very much a strange thing to take in the ears, sandwich lady. Several strange things! Through the nasty wet rain come two spiriters and a nasty catchy-carry-kind creature having a nasty carry on a number three spiriter in the wet rain. So the sharp-fur gods are crying with many a bad thought!"

What they said made little sense to Yattmur. Suddenly angered with them, she said, "Tell the sharp-furs to keep quiet and get back into the cave. I'm going to meet these new people."

She began to walk forward with her arms outspread and her hands open to show she intended no harm. As she went, though the thunder still bumped over the nearby hills, the rain petered to a drizzle and stopped. The two creatures ahead became more clearly visible—and suddenly there were three of them again. A blurred outline took on substance, becoming a thin human being who stared ahead at Yattmur with the same watchful gaze as his two companions.

Disturbed by this apparition, Yattmur came to a halt. At this the

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bulky figure moved forward, calling out as he came, pushing past his companions.

"Creatures of the evergreen universe, the Sodal Ye of the catchy-carry-kind comes to you with the truth. See you are fit to receive it!"

His voice had a richness and fruitiness, as though it travelled through mighty throats and palates to become sound. Moving under the shelter of its mellowness, the two human figures also advanced. Yattmur could see that they were indeed human—two females in fact of a very primitive order, utterly naked except for elaborate tattoos over their bodies, and expressions of invincible stupidity upon their faces.

Feeling that something was called for by way of reply, Yattmur bowed and said, "If you come peacefully, welcome to our mountain."

The bulky figure gave out a roar of inhuman triumph and disgust.

"You do not own this mountain! This mountain, this Big Slope, this growth of dirt and stone and boulder, owns you! The Earth is not yours: you are a creature of the Earth."

"You take my meaning a long way," Yattmur said, irritated. "Who are you?"

"Everything has a long way to be taken!" was the reply, but Yattmur was no longer listening; the bulky figure's roar had precipitated activity behind her. She turned to see the sharp-furs preparing to leave, squealing and jostling, pushing each other as they swung their sledge about until it pointed downhill.

"Carry us with you or come running gently beside your lovely riding machine!" cried the tummy-bellies, darting distractedly about and even rolling in the mud before their fierce-featured gods. "Oh please kill us with lovely death only take us with you running and riding away from this Big Slope. Take us away from this Big Slope with the sandwich people and now this big roaring scratchy-carry-kind. Take us, take us, cruel lovely gods of sharp gods!"

"No, no, no. Gup gup go away, sprawly men! Sharpish we go, and come back in a quiet time for you soon!" cried the sharp-furs, bounding about.

All was activity. In no time, despite apparent chaos and indirection, the sharp-furs were moving, running beside and behind their sledge, pushing or braking as was needed, leaping over and on top of it, screaming, chattering, throwing up their gourd helmets and catching them, travelling over the uneven ground at speed, heading towards the glooms of the valley.

Bewailing their fate with gusto, the deserted tummy-bellies slunk

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back towards their cave, averting their eyes from the newcomers. As the yipping progress of the sharp-furs dwindled, Yattmur heard her baby's cry from the cave. Forgetting everything else, she ran and picked him up, dandled him until he gurgled with joy at her, and then took him outside to speak once more with the bulky figure.

It began to orate directly Yattmur reappeared.

"Those sharp-teeth sharp-fur kind have fled from me. Leaf-brained idiots they are—nothing more, animals with toads in their heads. Though they will not listen to me now, the time will come when they will have to listen. Their kind will be driven like hail on the winds."

As the creature talked on, Yattmur observed him thoroughly, with growing amazement. She could not understand him properly, for his head, an enormous fish-like affair with a broad lower lip which turned down so far that it nearly concealed his lack of chin, was out of all proportion with the rest of his body. His legs, though bowed, were human in appearance, his arms were wrapped unmoving behind his ears, while from his chest a hairy, head-like growth seemed to emerge. Now and again she caught a glimpse of a large tail.

The pair of tattooed women stood by him, staring blankly ahead without appearing to see or think—or indeed to perform any activity more elaborate than breathing.

Now this strange bulky figure broke off his oration to gaze up at the thick clouds that masked the sun.

"I will sit," he said. "Place me on a suitable boulder, women. Soon the sky will clear, and then we shall see what we see."

The order was not addressed to Yattmur or the tummy-bellies, who clustered forlornly at their cave mouth, but to the tattooed women. They watched as he moved forward with his dull retinue.

A tumble of boulders lay nearby. One was large and flat-topped. By this the odd trio halted—and the bulky figure split into two as the women lifted the top part off the bottom! Half of him lay flat and fishy on the boulder, the other half stood bowed nearby.

Comprehension made Yattmur gasp, even as the tummy-bellies behind her wailed in dismay and raced each other into the cave. The bulky creature, the catchy-carry-kind as the sharp-furs called him, was two separate creatures! A giant fish shape, much like one of the dolphins she had seen on her voyage over the wastes of the ocean, had been carried by a stooped old human.

"You are two people!" she exclaimed.

"Indeed I am not!" said the dolphin-thing from its slab. "I am

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known as the Sodal Ye, greatest of all Sodals of the catchy-carry-kind, Prophet of the Nightside Mountains, who brings you the true word. Have you intelligence?"

About the man who had carried him clustered the two tattooed women. They did nothing effectual. They waved their hands at him without speaking. One of them grunted. As for the man, he had obviously been at his carrying for many seasons of fruit. Though the weight had gone from his shoulders, he remained bent as if he bore it yet, standing like a statue to dejection with his withered arms still circling the air above him, his back bowed, his eyes fixed only on the ground. Occasionally he shifted his stance; otherwise he was immobile.

"I asked you if you had intelligence, woman," said the being who called himself Sodal Ye, his voice as thick as liver. "Speak, since you can speak."

Yattmur pulled her eyes away from this horrifying porter and said, "What do you want here? Have you come to be helpful?"

"Spoken like a human woman!"

"Your women here don't seem to speak much!"

"They're not human! They cannot speak, as you should know. Have you never met any of the Arablers, the tattoo tribe before? Anyhow, why do you ask Sodal Ye for help? I am a prophet, not a servant. Are you in trouble?"

"Grave trouble. I have a mate who—"

Sodal Ye flipped one of his fins. "Cease. Don't bother me with your tales now. Sodal Ye has more important things to do—such as watching the mighty sky, the sea in which this tiny seed Earth floats. Also, this Sodal is hungry. Feed me and I'll help you if I can. My brain is the mightiest of all things on the planet."

Ignoring this boast, Yattmur said, indicating his motley retinue, "What of these companions of yours—aren't they hungry too?"

"They'll be no trouble to you, woman; they eat the bits that Sodal Ye leaves."

"I'll feed you all if you will truly try to help me."

She bustled off, ignoring the new speech on which he had launched himself. Already Yattmur felt that this was a creature —unlike the sharp-furs—with which she could deal: a conceited and possibly intelligent being that was nevertheless vulnerable; for she saw clearly that she had only to kill the stooped porter to render the Sodal helpless—should that be necessary. Meeting someone with whom she could negotiate from a position of strength was like a tonic; she felt nothing but goodwill towards the Sodal.

The tummy-belly men had always been as gentle as mothers with Laren. She handed him to them, seeing that they settled con-

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tentedly to amuse him before gathering food for her strange guests. Her hair dripped as she went, her clothes began to dry on her, but she took no notice.

Into a big gourd she crammed the remains of the leatherfeather feast and other edibles the tummy-bellies had collected: buds from the stalker grove, nuts, smoked mushrooms, berries and the fleshy fruits of the gourd. Another gourd stood full of water that had dripped through the fissured roof of the cave. She carried that out too.

Sodal Ye still lay on his boulder. He was bathed in an eerie cream light and did not move his eyes from the direction of the sun. Setting the food down, Yattmur looked where he did.

The clouds had parted. Over the dark and rugged sea of landscape, low hung the sun. It had changed its shape. Distorted by atmosphere, it was oblate: but no distortion of atmosphere could account for the great red-white wing which it had sprouted, a wing grown almost as large as its parent body.

"Oh! The blessed light takes wing to fly away and leave us!" Yattmur cried.

"You are safe yet, woman," Sodal Ye declared. "This I foresaw. Do not worry. To bring me my food would be more useful. When I tell you about the flames that are about to consume our world, you will understand, but I must feed before I preach."

But she fixed her eyes on the strange sight in the heavens. The storm centre had passed from the twilight zone into the regions of the mighty banyan. Above the forest, above the mile on mile of forest, piled the clouds, cream or purple, while under the clouds lightning flashed almost without cease. And in the centre of it hung that deformed sun.

Uneasily, when the Sodal called again, Yattmur brought the food forward.

At this moment, one of the two wretched women began to vanish from where she stood. Yattmur almost dropped the gourds, staring in fascination. In very little time, the woman existed only as a smudge. Her tattoo lines alone remained, a meaningless scribble in the air. Then they too faded and were gone.

The tableau held. Slowly the tattoos returned. The woman followed, dull-eyed and meagre as before. She made a movement with her hands to the other woman. The other woman turned to the Sodal and mouthed two or three slurred syllables.

"Good!" exclaimed the Sodal, slapping his fish tail on the boulder. "You wisely did not poison the food, mother, so I will eat it."

The woman who had made the mockery of speech now came forward and took the gourd of food

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over to the Sodal. Dipping her hand in, she commenced to feed him, thrusting handfuls into his fleshy mouth. He ate noisily and with relish, pausing only once to drink some water.

"Who are you all? What are you? Where do you come from? How do you vanish?" Yattmur asked.

Thickly through his mastication, Sodal Ye replied, "Something of all that I may tell you or I may not. You may as well know that only this one mute female can 'vanish,' as you call it. Let me eat. Keep quiet."

At least he had finished.

In the bottom of the gourd he had left some scraps, and on these three woebegone humans made their meal, drawing to one side in pitiful modesty to do so. The women fed their stooped fellow, whose arms were still fixed as if paralysed over his head.

"Now, I am prepared to hear your story," announced the Sodal, "and to do something to help you if possible. Know that I come of the wisest race of this planet. My kind have covered all the vast seas and most of the less interesting land. I am a prophet, a Sodal of the Highest Knowledge, and I will stoop to help you if I consider your need interesting enough."

"Your pride is remarkable," she said.

"Pah, what is pride when the Earth is about to die? Proceed with your silly tale, woman, if you are going to proceed at all."

IV

Yattmur wished to present the Sodal with her problem concerning Gren and the morel. But because she possessed no skill in unfolding a story and selecting the telling details for it, she gave him virtually the history of her life, and of her childhood with the tribe of herders who lived on the edge of the forest by the Black Mouth. She then related the arrival of Gren with his mate Poyly —who also wore a morel about her head and neck—and spoke of Poyly's death, and of their long subsequent wanderings, until fate like a heavy sea had cast them upon the shores of Big Slope. Then finally she told of the birth of her baby, and of how she knew it to be threatened by the fungus.

During all this, the Sodal of the catchy-carry-kind lay with seeming indifference on his boulder, his lower lip hanging low enough to reveal the orange rims round his teeth. Beside him—with total indifference—the pair of tattooed women lay on the grass flanking the bowed porter, who still stood like a monument to care with his arms above his skull. The Sodal surveyed none of them; his great oyster eye roved its gaze over the heavens.

At last it said, "You make an

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interesting case. I have heard details of many infinitesimal lives not unlike yours. By fitting them all together—by synthesising them in my extraordinary intelligence—I can construct a true picture of this world in its last stages of existence."

Angrily Yattmur stood up.

"Why I could knock you off your perch for that, you deboshed fish!" she exclaimed. "Is that all you have to say when previously you offered help?"

"Oh I could say a deal more, little human. But your problem is so simple that for me it scarcely seems to exist. I have met with these morels before in my travels, and though they are clever fellows, they have several points of vulnerability upon which anyone of my intellect will quickly seize."

"Please make a suggestion quickly."

"I have only one suggestion: that you entrust your baby to your mate Gren when he calls for it."

"That I can't do!"

"Ah ha, but you must. Don't back away. Come here while I explain why you must."

She did not like his plan. But behind the Sodal's conceit and pomposity lay a stubborn stony force; his presence too was awing; the very way he chewed out his words made them seem incontrovertible; so Yattmur clutched Laren with ill-ease and agreed.

"I dare not go and face him in the cave," she said.

"Get your tummy-creatures to fetch him here then," ordered the Sodal. "And hurry up about it. I travel on behalf of Fate, a master who at present has too much on his hands to bother with your concerns."

A rumble of thunder sounded, as if some mighty being made grudging agreement with his words. Yattmur looked anxiously towards the sun, still wearing its cocky feather of fire, and then went to speak to the tummy-bellies.

They sprawled together in the cosy dirt, arms round each other, chattering. As she entered the cave mouth, one of them picked up a handful of earth and gravel and flung it at her.

"Before you don't come in our cave or ever come here or want to come here, and now you are wanting to come here is too late, cruel sandwich lady! And the fishy-carry-man is your bad company—we don't belong. Poor tummy-men not want you come here—or they make the lovely sharp-furs crunch you up in the cave."

She stopped. Anger, regret, apprehension, ran through her, then she said firmly, "Your troubles are only just beginning if you feel like that. You know I wish to be your friend."

"You make all our troubles! Go quickly away!"

She backed away and, as she

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began to walk towards the other cave where Gren lay, she heard the tummy-bellies crying out to her. Whether their tone was one of abuse or supplication she did not know. Lightning snickered, stirring her shadow about her ankles. The baby wriggled in her arms.

"Lie still!", she said sharply. "He shall not harm you."

He sprawled at the back of the cave where she had last seen him. A fresh stab of lightning lit the brown mask through which his eyes peered. Though she saw him staring at her, he did not move or speak.

"Gren!"

Still he neither moved nor spoke.

Vibrant with strain, torn between love and hate of him, she leant there indecisively. When the lightning sparked again, she waved a hand before her eyes as though to brush it away.

"Gren, you can have the baby if you want him."

Then he moved.

"Come outside for him; it's too dark in here."

Having spoken, she moved away. Sickness rose in her as she felt the miserable difficulty of life. Over the saturnine slopes below her played inconstant light, adding to her dizziness. The catchy-carry-kind still lay on his boulder; beneath his shadow were the gourds, now empty of food and drink, and his forlorn retinue, hands to the sky, eyes to the ground. Yattmur sat down heavily with her back to the boulder, cradling Laren on her lap.

After a pause, Gren came out of the cave.

Walking slowly, slack-kneed, he approached her.

She could not tell whether she sweated from the heat or the tension. Because she was afraid to gaze on that pulpy mash that covered his face, Yattmur shut her eyes, opening them again only when she felt him near, fixing them on him as he stooped over her and the child. Uttering his pleased noise, Laren stretched up his arms with complete confidence.

"Sensible boy!" said Gren in his alien voice. "You are going to be a child apart, a wonder child, and I shall never leave you."

Now she shivered so violently that she could not hold the baby still. But Gren was bending close now, down on his knees, so near she caught an acrid and clammy odour from him. Through the fluttering fringes of her eyelashes she saw the brown fungus on his face begin to move.

It hung above Laren's head, gathering ready to drop on him. Her vision was full of it, peppered with spongy pores, and with a slab of the big boulder and one of the empty gourds. She believed herself to be breathing in short screams, so that Laren commenced

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to cry—and again the tissue slid over Gren's face with the reluctant movement of stiff porridge.

"Now!" cried Sodal Ye in a great voice.

Yattmur whipped the empty gourd forward, over her child. The morel was caught in the bottom as it fell, trapped by the plan the Sodal had devised. As Gren sagged sideways, she saw his true face twisted like rope in a knot of mental pain. The light ebbed and flowed, quick as a pulse, but she only knew something screamed, not recognising her own high note before she collapsed.

Two mountains clashed together like jaws with a bloated and squalling version of Laren lost between them. Thrown back to her proper senses, Yattmur sat up with a jerk and the monstrous vision fled.

"So you are not dead," said the catchy-carry-kind gruffly. "Kindly get up and silence your child, since my women are unable to do so."

It was incredible that everything was much as it had been before she fainted, so long had she seemed to be enveloped in night. The morel lay inert in the gourd that had trapped it, with Gren face down beside it. Sodal Ye was atop his boulder. The pair of tattooed women hugged Laren to their withered breasts without being able to hush his cries.

Yattmur stood up and took him from them, putting his mouth to one of her own plump breasts, where he at once began pulling greedily and was silent. To feel him there gradually stilled her trembling.

She stooped and turned her attention to Gren.

He turned his face towards her when she touched his shoulder.

"Yattmur," she said.

Weak tears stood in his eyes. All over his shoulders, in his hair, across his face, ran a red and white stippling where the wispy probes of the morel had gone down into his skins for nourishment.

"Has it gone?" he asked, and his voice was his own again.

"Look at it," she said. With her free hand, she tilted the gourd over so that he could see in.

For a long while he stared down at the still-living morel, helpless and motionless now, lying like excrement in the gourd. His inner vision was looking back—more with amazement now than fear—at the things that had been since the morel first dropped on him in the forests of Nomansland, the things that had passed like a dream: how he had travelled through lands and performed actions and above all held knowledge in his mind in ways that would have been unknown to his former free self.

He saw how all this had come about under the agency of the fun-

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gus that was now no more potent than a burnt mess of food in the bottom of a dish; and quite coolly he saw how he had at first welcomed this stimulus, for it had helped him overcome the limitations natural to him; only when the fungus's basic needs conflicted with his own had the process become evil, driving him almost literally out of his own mind, so that in working to the dictates of the morel he had almost preyed on his own kind.

Now to Gren came a memory of the fevers that had recently drained him when through his synapses ran the impulses and juices of his parasite.

It was over. He would never again hear the inner voice of the morel twanging through his brain.

At that a kind of loneliness attacked him. But he searched wildly along the corridors of his memory and thought, He has left me something good: I can evaluate, I can order my mind, I can remember what he taught me—and he knew so much.

Now it seemed to him that for all the havoc the morel had caused, he had found Gren's mind like a little stagnant pool and left it like a living sea—and it was with pity he looked down into the bowl.

"Don't weep, Gren," he heard Yattmur's voice say. "We are safe, we are all safe, and you will be all right."

He laughed shakily.

"I shall be all right," he agreed. He formed his scarred face into a smile and stroked her arms. "We shall all be all right."

Then reaction hit him. He rolled over and was instantly asleep.

V

Gren woke.

Yattmur was already busy, attending to Laren who squealed with delight as she washed him by the mountain stream. The tattooed women were also there, carrying water back and forth to pour over the catchy-carry-kind on his slab, while nearby stood the carrying man, cramped into his habitual gesture of servitude. Of the tummy-bellies, there was no sign.

He sat up gingerly. His face was puffy but his head clear; what then was the jarring he could feel that had woken him? He caught a glimpse of movement from the corner of his eye, and turning saw a trickle of stones roll down a gully some way off. At another point, more stones rolled.

"An earthquake is in progress," said Sodal Ye in a cavernous voice, fixing Gren with a sharp eye. "I have discussed it with your mate Yattmur and have told her there is no need for alarm. The world is ending on schedule, according to my predictions."

Gren rose to his feet and said,

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"You have a big voice, fish face; who are you?"

"I delivered you from the devouring fungus, little man, for I am the Sodal and Prophet of the Nightside Mountains, and all the denizens of the mountains hear what I have to say."

Gren was still thinking this over when Yattmur came up and said, "You've slept so long since the morel left you. We too have slept, and now we must prepare to move."

"To move? Where is there to go from here?"

"I will explain to you as I explained to Yattmur," said the Sodal, blinking as his women threw another gourd full of water over him. "I devote my life to travelling these mountains, giving out the Word of Earth. Now it is time for me to return to the Bountiful Basin, where my kind live, to gather fresh instructions. The Basin lies on the fringe of the Lands of Perpetual Twilight; if I take you as far as that, you can easily return to the eternal forests where you live. I shall be your guide and you will help attend me on the way."

Seeing Gren hesitate, Yattmur said, "You know we cannot stay here on Big Slope. We were carried here against our wishes. Now we have the chance to go, we must take it."

"If you wish it, it shall be so, though I'm tired of travel."

The earth trembled again. With unconscious humour, Yattmur said, "We must leave the mountain before it leaves us." She added, "And we must persuade the tummy-bellies to come with us. If they stay here, either the sharp-fur mountainears or starvation will kill them."

"Oh no," Gren said. "They've been trouble enough. Let the wretched creatures remain here. I don't want them with us."

"Since they don't want to come with you, that question is settled," said the Sodal with a flick of his tail. "Now, let us move, since I must not be kept waiting."

They had next to no possessions, so close were their lives to nature. To make ready was merely to check their weapons, to stow a little food for carrying and to cast a backward glance at the cave that had sheltered the birth of Laren. Catching sight of a nearby gourd and its contents, Gren asked, "What about the morel?"

"Leave it there to fester," Yattmur said.

"We take the morel with us. My women will carry it," said the Sodal.

His women were already busy, their tattoo lines merging with their wrinkles as they strained to lift the Sodal from his perch and onto the back of his carrying man. Between themselves they exchanged only grunts, although one of them was capable of making monosyllabic replies accompanied

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by gesture when the Sodal addressed her in a tongue Gren did not recognise. He watched fascinated until Sodal Ye was firmly in place, clutched round the middle by the stooped man.

"How long has that poor wretch been doomed to carry you about?" he asked.

"The destiny of his race—it is a proud one—is to serve the catchy-carry-kind. He was trained to it early. He neither knows nor wishes to know any other life."

They began to move, going downhill with the two slave women leading. Yattmur glanced back to see the three tummy-bellies staring mournfully at them from their cave. She raised her hand, beckoning and calling to them. Slowly they stood up and began to jostle forward, almost tripping over one another in their efforts to stay close together.

"Come on!" she called encouragingly. "You fellows come with us and we'll look after you."

"They've been trouble enough to us," Gren said. Stooping, he collected a handful of stones and flung them.

One tummy-belly was hit in the groin, one on the shoulder, before they broke and fled back into the cave, crying aloud that nobody loved them.

"You are too cruel, Gren. We should not leave them at the mercy of the sharp-furs."

"I tell you I've had enough of those creatures. We are better on our own." He patted her shoulder, but she remained unconvinced.

As they moved down Big Slope, the cries of the tummy-bellies died behind them and the shadows came up to meet them. The moment came when they waded in dark up to their ankles; then it rose rapidly, swallowing them, as the sun was hidden by a range of hills ahead.

The pool of darkness in which they now moved, and in which they were to travel for some while, was not total. Though at present no cloud banks overhead reflected downwards the light of the sun, the frequent lightning traced out their path for them.

Where the rivulets of Big Slope gathered into a fair-sized stream, the way became precipitous, for the water had carved a gully for itself, and they were forced to follow along its higher bank, going in single file along a steep cliff edge. The need for care slowed them. They descended laboriously round boulders, many of them clearly dislodged by the recent earth tremors. Apart from the sound of their footsteps, the only noise to compete with the stream was the regular groaning from the carrying man.

Soon a roaring somewhere ahead told them of a waterfall. Peering into the gloom, they saw a light. It was burning on what, as far as they could discern, was the lip of the cliff. The procession

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halted, bunching protectively together.

"What is it?" Gren asked. "What sort of creature lives in this miserable pit?"

Nobody answered.

Sodal Ye grunted something to the talking woman, who in turn grunted at her mute companion. The mute companion began to vanish where she stood, rigid in an attitude of attention.

Yattmur clasped Gren's arm. It was the first time he had seen this disappearance. Shadows all about them made it the more uncanny, as a ragged incline showed through her body. For a while her tattoo lines hung seemingly unsupported in the gloom. He strained his eyes to see. She had gone, was as intangible as the resonance of falling water.

They held their tableau until she returned.

Worldlessly the woman made a few gestures, which the other woman interpreted into grunts for the Sodal's benefit. Slapping his tail round his porter's calves to get him moving again, the Sodal said, "It's safe. One or two of the sharp-furs are there, possibly guarding a bridge, but they'll go away."

"How do you know?" Gren demanded.

"It will help if we make a noise," said Sodal Ye, ignoring Gren's question. Immediately he let out a deep baying call, which startled Yattmur and Gren out of their wits and set the baby wailing.

As they moved forward, the light flickered and went over the lip of the cliff. Arriving at the point where it had been, they could look down a steep slope. Lightning revealed six or eight of the snouted creatures bouncing and leaping into the ravine, one of them carrying a crude torch. Ever and again they looked back over their shoulders, barking invective.

"How did you know they'd go away?" Gren asked.

"Don't talk so much. We must go carefully here."

They had indeed come to a sort of bridge: one cliff of the gully had fallen forward in a solid slab, causing the stream to tunnel beneath it before splashing down into the nearby ravine; it rested against the opposite cliff, forming a rough arch over the flood. Because the way looked so broken and uncertain, its hazards increased in the twilight, the party moved forward hesitantly. Yet they had hardly stepped onto the crumbling rock of the bridge when a host of tiny beings clattered up startlingly from beneath their feet.

The air flaked into black flying fragments.

Savage with startlement, Gren struck out, punching at small bodies as they rocketed past him. Then they had lifted. Looking up, he saw a host of winged creatures circling and dipping over head.

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"Only bats," said Sodal Ye casually. "Move on. You human creatures have a poor turn of speed."

They moved. Again the lightning flashed, bleaching the world into a momentary still life. In the ruts at their feet, and just below them, and over the bridge side, reaching down to the tumbling waters, glistened such spiders' webs as Gren and Yattmur had never seen before, like a multitude of beards growing into the river.

She exclaimed about them, and the Sodal said loftily, "You don't realise the facts behind the curious sight you see here. How could you, being mere landlivers? Intelligence has always come from the seas. We Sodals are the only keepers of the world's wisdom."

"You certainly didn't concentrate on modesty," Gren said, as he helped Yattmur onto the further side.

"The bats and the spiders were inhabitants of the old cool world, many eons ago," said the Sodal, "but the growth of the vegetable kingdom forced them to adopt new ways of life or perish. So they gradually moved away from the fiercest competition into the dark, to which the bats at least were predisposed. And in so doing the two species formed an alliance."

He went on discoursing with the smoothness of a preacher even while his porter, aided by the tattooed women, heaved and strained and groaned to pull him up a broken stretch of bank onto firm ground. The voice poured forth assuredly, as thick and velvety as the night itself.

"The spider needs warmth for her eggs to hatch, or more warmth than she can get here. So she lays them, sews them into a bag, and the bat obligingly carries them up to Big Slope or one of these other peaks that catch the sun. When they hatch, he obligingly brings the progeny back again. Nor does he work for nothing.

"The grown spiders weave two webs, one an ordinary one, the other half in and half out of the water, so that the lower part of it forms a net below the surface. They catch fish or small living things in it and then hoist them out into the air for the bats to eat. Any number of similar strange things go on here of which you land-dwellers would have no knowledge."

They were now travelling along an escarpment that sloped down into a plain. Emerging as they were from under the bulk of a mountain, they slowly gained a better view of the terrain round about. From the tissue of shadows emerged an occasional crimson cone of a hill lofty enough to bathe its cap in sunlight. Gathering cloud threw an illusory glow over the land that changed minute by minute. Vague landmarks were thus by turns revealed and hidden

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as though by drifting curtains. Gradually the clouds blanketed the sun itself, so that they had to travel with additional caution through a ticker obscurity.

Over to their left appeared a wavering light. If it was the one they had seen by the ravine, then the sharp-furs kept pace with them. The sight reminded Gren of his earlier question.

"How does this woman of yours vanish, Sodal?" he asked sharply.

"We have a long way yet to go before reaching the Bountiful Basin," declared the Sodal. "Perhaps it will therefore amuse me to answer your question fully, since you seem a mite more interesting than most of your kind.

"The history of the lands through which we travel can never be pieced together, for the beings that lived here have vanished leaving no records but their unwanted bones. Yet there are legends. My race of the catch-carry-kind are great travellers; we have travelled widely and through many generations; and we have collected these legends.

"So we have learned that the Lands of Perpetual Twilight, for all their apparent emptiness, have offered shelter to many creatures. Always these creatures are going the same way.

"Always they come from the bright green lands over which the sun burns. Always they are heading either for extinction or for the lands of Night Eternal—and often the two mean the same thing.

"Each wave of creatures may stay here for several generations. But always it is forced further and further from the sun by its successors.

"Once there flourished here a race we know as the Pack People because they hunted in packs—as the sharp-furs will do in a crisis, but with far more organisation. Like the sharp-furs, the Pack People were sharp of teeth and brought forth living young, but they moved always on all-fours.

"The Pack People were mammal but non-human. Such distinctions are vague to me, for Distinguishing is not one of my subjects, but your kind once knew the Pack People as wolves, I believe.

"After the Pack People came a hardy race of some kind of human, who brought with them four-footed creatures which supplied them with food and clothing, and with which they mated."

"Can that be possible?" Gren asked.

"I only repeat to you the old legends. Possibilities are no concern of mine. Anyhow, these people were called Shipperds. They drove out the Packers and were in turn superseded by the Howlers, the species that legend says grew from the matings between the Shipperds and their creatures. Some Howlers still survive, but

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they were mainly killed in the next invasion, when the Heavers appeared. The Heavers were nomadic—I've run into a few of them, but they're savage brutes. Next came another off-shoot of humanity, the Arablers, a wretched race with some small gift for cultivating crops but of little ability.

"The Arablers were quickly over-run by the sharp-furs, or Bamboons, to give them their proper name.

"The sharp-furs have lived in this region in greater or lesser strength for ages. Indeed, their myths say they wrested the gift of cooking from the Arablers, the gift of sledge transport from the Heavers, the gift of fire from the Packers, and so on. How true that is, I don't know. The fact remains that the sharp-furs have over-run the land.

"They are capricious and untrustworthy. Sometimes they will obey me, sometimes not. Fortunately they are afraid of the powers of my species.

"I should not be surprised if you tree-dwelling humans—Sandwichers, did I hear the belly men call you?—aren't the forerunners of the next wave of invaders. Not that you'd be aware of it if you were. . . . The sharp-furs can be violent enemies."

Much of this monologue was lost on Gren and Yattmur, particularly as they had to concentrate on their progress over a stony valley.

"And who are these people you have as slaves here?" Gren asked, indicating the carrying man and the two women.

"As I should have thought you might have gathered, these are specimens of Arablers. They would all have died out but for our protection.

"The Arablers, you see, are devolving. I may possibly explain what I mean by that some other time. They have devolved furthest. They will turn into vegetables if sterility does not obliterate the race first. Long ago they lost even the art of speech. Although I say lost, this was in fact an achievement, for they could only survive at all by renouncing everything that stood between them and vegetative level.

"This sort of change is not surprising under present conditions on this world, but with it went a more unusual transformation. The Arablers lost the notion of passing time; after all, there is no longer anything to remind us daily or seasonally of time: so the Arablers in their decline forgot it entirely. For them there was simply the individual life span. It was—it is, the only time span they are capable of recognising: the period-of-being.

"So they have developed a coextensive life, living where they need along that span."

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Yattmur and Gren looked blankly through the gloom at each other.

"Do you mean these women can move forward or backward in time?" Yattmur asked.

"That wasn't what I said: nor was it how the Arablers would express it. Their minds are not like mine or even like yours, but when for instance we came to the bridge guarded by the sharp-fur with the torch, I got one of the women to move along her period-of-being to see if we crossed the bridge uneventfully.

"She returned and reported that we did. We advanced and she was proved right, as usual.

"Of course they only operate when danger threatens. This spanning process is primarily a form of defence. For instance, when Yattmur brought us food the first time, I made the spanning woman span ahead to see if it poisoned us. When she returned and reported us still alive, then I knew it was safe to eat.

"And similarly when I first saw you with the sharp-furs and—what do you call them?—the belly-tummy men, I sent the spanning woman to see if you would attack us. So you see even a miserable race like the Arablers have their uses!"

They were forging slowly ahead over small foothills, travelling through a deep green gloom nourished by sunshine reflected from cloud banks overhead. Ever and again they caught a glimpse of moving lights over on their left flank; the sharp-furs were still following them, and had added two more torches to their original one.

Gren stared with new curiosity at the two Arabler women leading their party.

Because they were naked, he could see how little their sexual characteristics were developed. Their hair was scanty on the head, non-existent on the mons veneris. Their hips were narrow, their breasts flat and pendulous, although, as far as one could judge their age, they did not seem old.

They walked with neither enthusiasm nor hesitation, never glancing back. One of the women carried on her head the gourd that held the morel.

Through Gren ran a sort of awe to feel how different must be the understandings of these women from his own; what could their lives be like, how would their thoughts flow, when their period-of-being was not a consecutive but a concurrent vista?

He asked Sodal Ye, "Are these Arablers happy?"

The catchy-carry-kind laughed throatily.

"I've never thought to ask them such a question."

"Ask them now."

With an impatient flip of his tail, the Sodal said, "All you human and similar kinds are cursed with inquisitiveness. It's a horri-

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ble trait that will get you nowhere. Why should I speak to them just to gratify your curiosity?

"Besides, it needs absolute nullity of intelligence to be able to span; to fail to distinguish between past and present and future needs a great concentration of ignorance. The Arablers have no language at all; once introduce them to the idea of verbalisation and their wings are clipped. If they talk, they can't span. If they can span, they can't talk.

"That's why it is always necessary for me to have two women with me—women preferably because they are even more ignorant than the men. One woman has been taught a few words so that I can give her commands; she communicates them by gesture to her friend, who can thus be made to span when danger threatens. It is all rather roughly devised, but it has saved me much trouble."

"What about the poor fellow who carried you?" Yattmur asked.

From Sodal Ye came a vibrating growl of contempt.

"A lazy brute, nothing but a lazy brute! I've ridden him since he was a lad and he's very near worn out already. Hup, you idle monster! Get along there, or we'll never be home."

VI

Much more the Sodal told them. To some of it Gren and Yattmur responded with an anger they concealed. To some of it they paid no heed. The Sodal orated unceasingly, until his voice became merely another factor in the fluttering and lightning-cluttered gloom.

They kept moving even when rain fell so heavily that it turned the plain about them to mud. The clouds swam in a green light; even in their discomfort they felt that it was growing warmer. Still the rain fell. Because nowhere in the open country afforded shelter, they kept doggedly trudging forward. It was as though they walked in the middle of a bowl of swirling soup.

By the time the rain storm died, they had begun again to climb. Yattmur insisted on stopping for the baby's sake. The Sodal, who had enjoyed the rain, reluctantly agreed. Under a bank they managed with difficulty to start a poor smouldering grass fire. The baby was fed. They all ate sparingly.

"We are nearly at Bountiful Basin," declared Sodal Ye. "From the tops of this next range of mountains you will see it, its sweet salt waters dark, but with one long bar of sunlight falling across it. Ah, it'll be good to be back in the sea. It's lucky for you land-goers that we are a dedicated race, or we'd never leave the water in exchange for your benighted medium. Well, prophecy is our burden and we must shoulder it cheerfully. . . ."

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He began shouting at the women to hurry and fetch more grass and roots for the fire. They had placed him on top of the bank.

The unfortunate carrying man was down in the hollow, standing with his arms above his head almost on top of the fire, letting smoke swirl round him as he attempted to induce a little heat into his body. Seeing Sodal Ye's attention was distracted, Gren hurried over to the man. He grasped his shoulder.

"Can you understand what I am saying?" he asked. "Do you speak in my tongue, friend?"

The fellow never raised his head. It hung down onto his chest as if his neck was broken, rolling slightly as the man muttered something unintelligible. When next lightning spread its palsied gleam over the world, Gren glimpsed scars about the top of the man's spinal cord. In a flash of understanding as swift as the lightning, Gren knew the man had been mutilated so that his head would not lift.

Dropping onto one knee, Gren peered upward at that bowed countenance. He had a view of a twisted mouth and an eye like a gleaming coal.

"How far can I trust this catchy-carry-kind, friend?" he asked.

The mouth writhed slowly, as if from an agony of which it had long grown bored. It dropped words thick as matter.

It said: "No good . . . I no good . . . break, fall, die filth . . . see, I finish . . . one more climb. . . . Ye of all sins—Ye *you* carry . . . you strong back . . . you carry Ye . . . He know . . . I filth finish . . ."

Something splashed onto Gren's hand as he fell back; whether it was tears or saliva he could not tell.

"Thanks, friend, we'll see about all that," he said. Moving over to where Yattmur was cleaning Laren, he told her, "I felt in my bones this talkative fish was not to be trusted. He has a plan to use me as his beast of burden when this carrying man dies—or so the carrying man says, and he should know the ways of the catchy-carry-kind by now."

Before Yattmur could answer, the Sodal let out a croaking roar. Gren jumped guiltily up.

"Something's coming!" the Sodal said. "Women, get me mounted at once. Yattmur, smother that fire. Gren, come up here and see what you can see."

Scrambling onto the top of the bank, Gren peered about while the women pulled Sodal Ye into position on the carrying man's back. Even above the noise of their panting, Gren heard the other sounds that the Sodal must have heard: a distant and insistent yowling and howling that rose or fell in angry rhythm. It sent the blood draining from his face.

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He saw with ill ease a group of about ten lights spread out not far away on the plain, but it was from another quarter that the eerie sound came. Then moving figures caught his eye; he strained to observe them more closely, his heart thudding.

"I can see them," he reported. "They—they glow in the dark."

"They're Howlers then, for sure—the man-animal species I told you of. Are they coming this way?"

"It looks like it. What can we do?"

"Get down with Yattmur and stay quiet. Howlers are like sharp-furs; they can be nasty if they are upset. I'll send my woman spanning to see what is happening soon."

The pantomime of grunting and gesture was undergone, both before the woman vanished and after she reappeared. All the while the eerie howling grew in volume.

"The woman spanned and saw us climbing up the slope ahead, so we evidently shall not be harmed. Just wait quietly until the Howlers have gone by; then we will move on. Yattmur, keep that baby child of yours quiet."

Somewhat reassured by what the Sodal said, they stood by the bank.

Presently the Howlers sped past, travelling in single file not more than a stone's throw away. Their yipping cry, evidently designed to intimidate, rose and fell as they went. It was impossible to say whether they ran or leaped or hopped over the ground. So fast and recklessly they travelled, they were like visions from a maniac's dream.

Though they glowed with a dim white light, their shapes were ill-defined. Were their outlines mockeries of human figures? It was clear at least how tall they were, and as thin as wraiths, before they went bounding away across the desolate plain, trailing their awful cry behind them.

Gren found he was clutching Yattmur and Laren and trembling.

"What were those things?" Yattmur asked.

"I told you, woman, they were the Howlers," said the Sodal, "the race about which I was telling you, that was driven into the lands of Night Eternal. That party was probably on a hunting expedition and is now returning home. We too must be on the move. The sooner we get over this next mountain, the better pleased I shall be."

So they moved on again, Gren and Yattmur without the ease of mind they had previously enjoyed.

Because Gren developed the habit of glancing back, he was the one to see that the moving lights which he took to be the torches of sharp-furs were coming nearer on their left flank. Occasionally a bark floated to him on the stillness like a twig drifting across water.

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"Those sharp-furs are closing in on us," he told the Sodal. "They've followed us almost the whole journey, and if we aren't careful they'll catch us on this hill."

"Excrement on the beasts, it's unlike them to follow so consistently. They generally forget a course of action almost as soon as they have thought of it. Something ahead must be attracting them. All the same, they're bold in the dark; we don't want to risk attack. Move faster. Hup, you ambling Arabler, hup ho!"

But the torches gained on them. As they ascended up the long long pull of the mountain, so the filtered light overhead gradually increased, until they could see a blur of bodies about the torch-bearers. A considerable mob of creatures was pursuing them, although as yet at some distance.

Their worries were piling up. Yattmur observed more creatures on their right flank, heading tangentially towards them. Faint barks and yippings echoed through the wastes. Undoubtedly they were being overtaken by large numbers of sharp-furs.

Now the small party was leaning forward against the drag of the hill and almost running in anxiety.

"We'll be safe when we get to the top. Hup ho!" cried the Sodal encouragingly. "Not much further before we see Bountiful Basin. Hup hey there, ugly brute!"

Without word or warning his carrying man collapsed under him, pitching him forward into a gully. For a moment the Sodal lay half-stunned on his back; then a flick of his powerful tail put him right way up again. He began to curse inventively at his steed.

As for the tattooed women, they stopped, and the one carrying the guard with the morel in set it down on the ground, but neither went over to the aid of the fallen man. Gren did that, running to the bundle of bones and turning it over as gently as possible. The carrying man made no sound. The eye like an ember had closed.

Breaking into Sodal Ye's swearing, he said angrily, "What have you to complain of? Didn't this poor wretch carry you until the last lungful of air left his body? You flogged all you could out of him, so be content! He's dead now, and he's free of you, and he'll never carry you again."

"Then you must carry me," answered the Sodal without hesitation. "Unless we get out of here quickly, we shall all be torn to bits by those packs of sharp-furs. Listen to them—they're getting nearer! So look smart, man, if you know what's good for you, and make these women lift me onto your back."

"Oh no! You're staying there in the gully, Sodal. We can get on more quickly without you. You've had your last ride."

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"No!" The Sodal's voice rose like a foghorn. "You don't know what the crest of this mountain's like. There's a secret way down the other side into Bountiful Basin that I can find and these women can't. You'll be trapped on the top without me, that I promise you. The sharp-furs will have you."

"Oh Gren, I'm so afraid for Laren. Let's take the Sodal rather than stand here arguing, please."

He stared at Yattmur through the dull dawnlight. She was a blur, a chalk drawing on a rock face, yet he clenched his fist as if she were a real antagonist.

"Do you want to see me as a beast of burden?"

"Yes, yes, anything rather than have us all torn apart! It's only over one mountain, isn't it? You carried the morel far enough without complaint."

Bitterly he motioned to the tattooed women.

"That's better," said the Sodal, wriggling between Gren's encircling arms. "Just try and keep your head a little lower, so that no discomfort is caused to my throat. Ah, better still. Fine, yes, you'll learn. Forward, hup ho!"

Head well down, back bent, Gren struggled up the slope with the catchy-carry-kind on top of him, Yattmur carrying the babe beside him and the two women going on ahead. A desolate chorus of sharp-fur cries floated to them. They scrambled along a stream bed with water washing cold about their knees, helped each other up a precipitous gravel bank, and came onto less taxing ground.

Yattmur could see that over the next rise lay sunshine. When she thought to take in the landscape about them, she observed a new and more cheerful world of undulating slopes and hill tops showed all round. The sharp-fur parties had fallen from view behind boulders.

Now the sky was treaked with light. An occasional traverser sailed overhead, making for the night side or heading up into space. It was like a sign of hope.

Still they had some way to go. But at last the sun lay hot on their backs and after a long steady pull they stood panting on the crest of the mountain. The other side of it fell away in a great ravaged cliff down which it would be impossible for anything to climb.

They stood and beheld the view.

Nestling in a hundred intersecting curtains of shadow lay an arm of the sea, wide and serene. Fanning straight across it, casting a glow over the whole basin of cliffs in which the sea rested, was a swathe of light, just as Sodal Ye had predicted. Creatures moved in the water, leaving their marks momentarily upon it. On a strip of beach, other figures moved, winding between primitive white huts

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as tiny as pearls in the distance.

The Sodal alone was not staring down.

His eyes went to the sun and to the narrow sector of fully illumined world that could be seen from his vantage point, the lands where the sun shone perpetually. There the brilliance was almost intolerable. He needed no instruments to tell him that the heat and light had increased in intensity since they left Big Slope.

"Even as I predicted," he cried, "all things are melting into light. The day is coming when the Great Day comes and all creatures become a part of the evergreen universe. I must talk to you about it some time."

The lightning which had almost played itself out over the lands of Perpetual Twilight still flittered down in electric shafts over the bright side. One particularly vivid shaft struck down into the mighty forest—and stayed visible! Writhing like a snake caught between earth and heaven it remained; and from the base it began to turn green. Green rose up it into the sky, and the shaft steadied and thickened as it went, until something like a pointing finger stretched into the canopy of space and the tip of it was lost to view in the hazy atmosphere.

"Aaaah, now I have seen the sign of signs!" said the Sodal. "Now I see and now I know the end of Earth draws near."

"What in the name of terror is it?" Gren said, squinting up from under his burden at the green column.

"The spores, the dust, the hopes, the growth, the essence of the centuries of Earth's green fuse, no less. Up it goes, ascending, for new fields. The ground beneath that column must be baked to brick! You heat a whole world for half an eternity, stew it heavy with its own fecundity, and then apply extra current: and on the reflected energy rises the extract of life, buoyed up—"

"The sharp-furs are coming!" Yattmur cried. "Listen! I can hear them shouting."

Looking back down the way they had come, she saw tiny figures in the gloaming, some still bearing smoky torches, climbing slowly but climbing steadily, swarming uphill mainly on all fours.

"Where do we go?" Yattmur asked. "They'll be upon us if you don't stop talking, Sodal."

Shaken out of his contemplation, Sodal Ye said, "We have to move higher up the crest of the mountain. Only a little way. Behind this big spur sticking up ahead is a secret way leading down among the rocks. There we strike a passage leading right through the cliff down to Bountiful Basin. Don't worry—those wretches have some distance to climb yet."

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Gren had started moving towards the spur before Sodal Ye stopped speaking.

Anxiously, propping Laren over one shoulder, Yattmur ran forward. Then she paused.

"Sodal," she said. "Look! One of the great traversers has crashed behind the spur. Your escape way will be completely blocked!"

VII

The spur stood up crazily on the sheer edge of the cliff, like a chimney built on top of a steeply-pitched roof. Behind it, massive and firm, lay the bulk of a traverser. Only the fact that they viewed its shadowed side, which rose up like part of the ground, had prevented their noticing it earlier.

Sodal Ye let out a great cry.

"How are we to get under that great vegetable?" he demanded, and he slapped Gren's legs with his tail in a fury of frustration.

Gren staggered and fell against the tattooed woman carrying the gourd. They sprawled together on the grass while the Sodal flopped beside them, bellowing.

The woman gave a cry of something between pain and rage, covering her face while her nose trickled blood. She took no notice when the Sodal croaked at her. As Yattmur helped Gren up, the Sodal said, "Curse her dung-devouring descendants, I'm telling her to make the spanning woman get spanning and see how we can escape from here. Kick her and make her pay attention—and then get me onto your back again and see you're less careless in future."

He started shouting at the woman again.

Without warning, she jumped up. Her face was as distorted as a squeezed fruit. Seizing the gourd by her side, she brought it swinging down hard onto the Sodal's skull. The blow knocked him unconscious. The gourd split under the impact, and the morel slid out like treacle, covering the Sodal's head with a sort of lethargic contentment.

Gren's and Yattmur's eyes met, worried, questioning. The spanning woman's mouth split open. She cackled soundlessly. Her companion sat down and wept.

"Now what do we do?" asked Gren.

"Let's see if we can find the Sodal's bolthole; that's the first worry," Yattmur said.

He touched her arm for comfort.

"If the traverser's alive, perhaps we can light a fire under it and drive it away," he said.

Leaving the two Arabler women to wait vacantly beside Sodal Ye, they moved up towards the traverser.

As the sun's output of radiation had increased towards that day, no longer so far distant, when it would turn nova, so the growth of

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vegetation had increased to undisputed supremacy, overwhelming all other kinds of life, driving them either to extinction, or to refuge in the twilight zone. The traversers, great spider-like monsters of vegetable origin that sometimes grew up to a mile in length, were the culmination of the might of the kingdom of plants.

Hard radiation had become a necessity for them. They were the first vegetable astronauts of the hothouse world. Fearlessly they travelled between Earth and Moon, spinning out their thread behind them. Long after man had rolled up his noisy affairs and retired to the trees from whence he came, the traversers reconquered that other white world he had lost.

Gren and Yattmur moved along under the green and black fibrous bulk of the creature, Yattmur hugging Laren, who gazed at everything with an alert eye. Abruptly, Gren paused.

He looked up—and a dark face stared down at him from high upon that monstrous flank. After a startled moment, he made out more than one face. Concealed in the fuzz covering the traverser was a row of human beings.

Instinctively he drew his knife.

Seeing they were observed, the watchers emerged from hiding and began to swarm down the flank of the traverser. Ten of them appeared.

"Get back!" Gren said urgently.

"But the sharp-furs—"

The attackers took them by surprise. Spreading wings or cloaks, they jumped down from a height well above Gren's head. Coming running with a vicious intent, they started to surround Gren and Yattmur. Each one brandished a stick or a sword.

"Stand steady or I'll run you through!" Gren shouted savagely, leaping in front of Yattmur and the baby.

"Gren! You are Gren of the group of Lily-yo!"

The figures had stopped. One of them, the one who exclaimed, came forward with open arms, dropping her sword.

He knew her dark face!

"Living shades! Lily-yo! Lily-yo! Is it you?"

"It is I, Gren, and no other!"

And now two others were coming up to him, crying in pleasure. He recognised them, faces forgotten but ever familiar, the faces of two adult members of the tribal group in which his childhood had been spent: Haris the man, and a woman, Flor, clasping his hand. Yet they were changed.

Seeing his questioning gaze run over their faces, Haris said, "You are a man now, Gren. We too have altered much. These others with us are our friends. We have returned from another world, flying through space itself in the belly of this traverser. Unfortunately the creature became ill on

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the way and crashed here, in this miserable land of shadows. With no way to get back to the warm forests, we have been caught here for far too long, suffering attacks from all sorts of unimaginable creatures."

"And you're about to suffer the worst one yet," Gren said. "Our enemies gather against us. Time for stories later, friends—and I'll guess mine is more strange than yours—because a great pack, two great packs, of sharp-furs are nearly on us."

"Sharp-furs you call them?" Lily-yo said. "We could see a little of their approach from on top of the traverser. What makes you think they are after us? In this miserable land of starvation they must surely be after the traverser for food?"

To Gren this idea was unexpected; yet he recognised its likelihood. Only the considerable bulk of food the traverser represented would have drawn so many sharp-furs so far so consistently. He turned to see what Yattmur thought. She was not there.

Immediately, he pulled out the knife he had just sheathed and jumped round, searching for her, calling her name. The members of Lily-yo's band who did not know him fingered their swords anxiously, but he ignored them.

Yattmur stood a short way off, clutching their child and scowling in his direction. She had gone back to where the Sodal lay; the two Arabler women stood fruitlessly by, gazing ahead. Muttering angrily, Gren pushed by Haris to go to her.

"What are you doing?" he called. "Bring Laren here."

"Come and get him if you want him," she replied. "I will have nothing to do with these strange savages. You belong to me—why do you turn from me to them? Why do you talk to them?"

"Oh shades protect me from foolish women! You don't understand—"

He stopped.

They had left their escape from the ridge too late.

Moving in an impressive silence, perhaps because they needed their breath, the first lines of sharp-furs appeared over the crest of the hill.

They halted on confronting the humans, but the back ranks jostled them forward. With their mantles standing out stiff about their shoulders and their teeth bared, they did not have the look of friends. One or two of them wore the ridiculous helmets shaped out of gourds on their heads.

Through cold lips, Yattmur said, "Some of these were the ones who promised they would help the tummy-bellies to get home."

"How can you tell? They are so much alike."

"That old one with the yellow

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whiskers—I'm sure I recognise him at least."

Lily-yo, coming up with her group, asked, "What are we going to do? Shall we let them have the traverser if they want it?" Gren made no reply.

He walked forward until he stood directly in front of the yellow-whiskered creature Yattmur had pointed out.

"We bear you no ill-will, sharp-fur bamboon people. Do you have three tummy-belly men who were our companions with you?"

Without answering, Yellow Whisker shambled round to consult with his friends. The nearest sharp-furs reared upon their hind legs and talked yappingly to each other. Finally Yellow Whisker turned back to Gren, showing his fangs as he spoke. He cuddled something in his arms.

"Yip yip yap yes, skinny one, the bouncing-bellies are wiff wiff with us. See! Look!"

With a quick motion, he threw something at Gren—who was so close he could do nothing but catch it.

It was the severed head of one of the tummy-bellies.

Gren acted without thought. Dropping the head, he flung himself forward in scarlet fury, thrusting out with his knife as he did so. His blade caught the yellow-whiskered sharp-fur in the stomach before he could dodge. As the creature staggered sideways screaming, Gren grabbed his grey paw with both hands. Swinging round, he swung the body with him, revolved twice—cast it right over the edge of the tall cliff.

Absolute silence fell, a silence of surprise, as Yellow Whisker vanished.

In the next moment, our fate is decided, Gren thought. He sensed Yattmur, Lily-yo, and the other humans behind him, but dared not move even to look back at them.

Yattmur leant forward to the broken and bloodied object lying at their feet. The head by its severance had been reduced to a mere thing: though a thing of horror. Looking into the watery jelly that had been eyes, Yattmur read there the fate of all three tummy-belly men.

Unheard she cried, "And they were always so gentle with Laren!"

Then the noise broke out behind her.

A terrible roar burst forth, a roar of alien cadence and power, a roar—breaking over their heads so unexpectedly—that turned their blood to snow. The sharp-furs cried in awe: then they turned about, jostling and fighting to get back to the safety of the shadows below the crest of the mountain.

Deafened, Gren looked round. Lily-yo and her companions were heading back towards the dying traverser. Yattmur was trying to

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pacify the baby. Hands over their heads, the two Arabler women lay prone on the ground.

Again the noise came, swelling with an anguished despair. Sodal Ye had recovered consciousness and cried aloud his wrath. And then, opening his fleshy mouth with its huge lower lip, he spoke, in words that only gradually merged into sense.

"Where are your empty-headed heads, you creatures of the darkling plains? You have toads in the head, not to understand my prophecies where the green pillars grow. Growing is symmetry, up and down, and what was called decay is not decay but the second part of growth. One process, you toad-heads—the process of devolution, that carries you down into the green well from which you came. . . . I'm lost in the mazes—Gren! Gren, like a mole I tunnel through an earth of understanding. . . . Gren, the nightmares—Gren, from the fish's belly I call to you. Can you hear me? It's I—your old ally the morel!"

"Morel?"

In his astonishment, Gren dropped to his knees before the catchy-carry-kind. Blank-faced, he stared at the leprous brown crown that now adorned its head. As he stared, the eyes opened, filmily at first, and then they focussed on him.

"Gren! I was near death. . . . Ah, the pain of consciousness. . . . Listen, man, it is I, your morel, who speaks. I hold the Sodal in check, and am using his faculties, as once I had to use yours; there's so much richness in his mind—coupling it with my own knowledge . . . ah, I see clearly not just this little world but all the green galaxy, the evergreen universe. . . ."

Frantically, Gren jumped up.

"Morel, are you crazed? Do you not see what a position we are in here, all about to be killed by these sharp-furs when they gather courage to charge? What are we to do? If you are truly there, if you are sane, help us!"

"I'm not crazed—unless to be the only wise creature on a toad-minded world is to be crazed. . . . All right, Gren, I tell you help comes! Look into the sky!"

The landscape had long been suffused with an uncanny light. Away in the distant and unbroken ranks of jungle stood the green pillar, joined now by another which had formed some way off. They seemed to taint the lower atmosphere with their glow, so that it did not surprise Gren to see cloud bars of viridescent hue striping the sky. From one of these clouds dropped a traverser. Falling at leisurely speed, it seemed to aim at the mountain promontory on which Gren and the others stood.

"Is it coming here, morel?" Gren asked. Though he partly re-

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sented the resurrection of the tyrant that had recently sapped his life blood, he saw that the fungus, dependent on the legless Sodal, could offer him only help, not harm.

"It's descending here," the morel answered. "You and Yattmur and the baby come and lie down here so that it does not crush you when it lands. It is probably coming to mate—to cross-fertilise—with the dying traverser. Directly it gets down, we must climb onto it. You must carry me, Gren, do you understand? Then I'll tell you what else to do."

As he spoke through the Sodal's blubber mouth, wind ruffled the grass. The hairy body overhead expanded until it filled almost their whole view: and gently the traverser landed on the brink of the cliff, perching on top of its dying mate.

VIII

One great leg came down, butting firm against the earth like a buttress on which rank mosses grew. It scratched for a hold and then was still.

Gren, with Yattmur and the tattooed women trailing behind, came up to it and stared up its height. He released the tail of the Sodal, which he had dragged over the ground, and surveyed that great bulk.

"We can't climb up there!" he said. "You're mad to consider such a thing, morel."

"Climb, man creature, climb!" bellowed the morel.

Still hesitating, Gren stood while Lily-yo and the others of her band came round. They had hidden behind the tall crag, and were anxious to get away.

"As your fish-creature says, this is our only way to safety," Lily-yo said. "Climb, Gren!"

"You don't have to fear a traverser, Gren," Haris said.

Gren still stood there. The thought of clinging to something that flew through the flimsy air made him sick; he remembered his helpless ride on the back of the vegbird that crashed in Nomansland, remembered too the journeys on other things, each landing him in a worse situation than the last. Only on the journey just concluded, which he had undertaken under his own control with the Sodal, had the destination seemed preferable to the starting point.

As he wavered, the morel was again bellowing with the Sodal's voice, goading the others to climb the fibrous leg, even goading the tattooed women to carry him up, which they did with the aid of Lily-yo's party. They were soon all perched high up on the immense back, looking down and calling at him. Only Yattmur stood by him.

"Just when we are free of the tummy-bellies and the morel, why should we have to depend on this

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monstrous creature?" he muttered.

"We must go, Gren. It will take us away to the warm forests, far from the sharp-furs, where we can live with Laren in peace. You know we can't stay here."

He looked at her, and at the big-eyed child in her arms. She had endured so much trouble for him, since the time the Black Mouth sang its irresistible song.

"We will go if *you* wish it, Yattmur. Let me carry the boy." And then with a flash of anger he peered up, calling to the morel. "And stop your stupid shouting—I'm coming!"

He called too late: the morel had already stopped. When Gren and Yattmur finally pulled themselves panting onto the top of the living hill, it was to discover the morel busily directing Lily-yo and her company in a new enterprise.

The Sodal turned one of its piggy stares at Gren and said, "As you know as well as anyone, it is time for me to divide, to propagate. So I'm going to take over this traverser as well as the Sodal."

"Mind it doesn't take you over," Gren said feebly. He sat down with a thud as the traverser moved. But the huge creature, in the throes of fertilisation, had so little sensitivity that it remained engrossed in its own blind affairs as Lily-yo and the others, working savagely with their long knives, cut deeply into its epidermis.

When they had a crater exposed, they lifted the Sodal Ye so that he hung head down into it; though he wriggled weakly, the morel had him too much under control for him to do more. The ugly pitted brown shape of the morel began to slide; half of it dropped into the hole, after which —under direction—the others covered it with a sort of bung of solid flesh. Gren marvelled at the way they hurried to do the morel's bidding.

Yattmur sat and suckled her child. As Gren settled beside her, she pointed a finger across the dark side of the mountain. From their vantage point, they could see sad and shadowy clusters of sharp-furs moving away to safety to await events; there and there their torches gleamed, punctuating the gloom like blossoms in a melancholy wood.

"They're not attacking," Yattmur said. "Perhaps we could climb down and find the secret way to Bountiful Basin?"

The landscape tilted.

"It's too late," Gren said. "Hold tightly! We're flying."

The traverser had risen. For a moment, below them flashed the high cliff and they were falling down it, sweeping rapidly over rock. Bountiful Basin spun towards them, growing as it turned and came nearer.

Into long shade they slipped, then into light—their shadow pasted across the stippled water—

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into shade again, and then once more into light as they rose, gained certainty, and headed towards the plumed sun.

Laren gave a yelp of alarm and then returned to the breast, shutting his eyes as if it was all too much for him.

"Gather round, everyone," cried the morel, "while I speak to you through this fish's mouth. You must all listen to what I have to say."

Clinging to fibrous hairs, they settled about him, only Gren and Yattmur showing any reluctance to do so.

"Now I am two bodies," pronounced the morel, "I have taken control of this traverser; I am directing its nervous system. It will go only where I wish. Have no fear, for no harm will come to any of you immediately.

"What is more fearful is the knowledge I have drained from this fishy catchy-carry-kind, Sodal Ye. You must hear about it, for it alters my plans.

"These Sodals are people of the seas. While all other beings with intelligence have been isolated into small areas by vegetable life, the Sodals in the freedom of the oceans have been able to keep in contact with all their communities. They can still rove the planet uninterruptedly. So they have gained rather than lost knowledge.

"They have discovered that the world is about to end. Not immediately—not for many generations—but certainly it will end, and those green columns of disaster rising from the jungle to the sky are signs that the end has already begun.

"In the really hot regions—regions unknown to any of us, where the burning bushes and other fire-using plants live—the green columns have already been for some time. In the Sodal's mind I find knowledge of them. I see some blazing on shores glimpsed from a steaming sea."

The morel was silent. Gren knew how he would be dredging down for more intelligence. He shuddered, admiring somehow the morel's excitement for facts, yet disgusted by his greedy nature.

Underneath them, floating slowly by, bobbed the coast of the Lands of Perpetual Twilight. They showed appreciably brighter before the heavy lips moved and once more the voice of the Sodal carried the thoughts of the morel.

"These Sodals don't always understand all the knowledge they have gained. Ah, the beauty of the plan when you see it. . . . Humans, there is this burning fuse of a force called devolution. . . . How can I put it so that your tiny brains will understand?

"Very long ago, men—your remote ancestors—discovered that life grew and evolved from, as it were, a speck of fertility: an amoeba, which served as the gate-

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way to life like an eye of a needle beyond which lay the amino acids and the inorganic world of nature. And this inorganic world too, they found, evolved in its huge complexity from one speck, a primal atom.

"These vast processes of growth men came to understand. What the Sodals have discovered is that growth incorporates also what men would have called decay: that not only does nature have to be wound up to wind down, it has to wind down to be wound up.

"This creature I now inhabit knows the world is in a winding down phase. This he has vaguely been trying to preach to you lesser breeds.

"At the beginning of this sun system's time, all forms of life were blurred together and by perishing supplied other forms. They arrived on Earth from space like motes, like sparks, in Cambrian times. Then the forms evolved into animal, vegetable, reptile, insect—all varieties and species that flooded the world, many of them now gone.

"Why are they gone? Because the galactic fluxes which determine the life of a sun are now destroying this sun. These same fluxes control animate life; they close it down as they will close Earth's existence. So nature is devolving. Again the forms are blurring! They never ceased to be anything but inter-dependent—the one always living off the other—and now they merge together once more. Were the tummy-bellies vegetable or human? Are the sharp-furs human or animal? And the creatures of the hothouse world, these traversers, the killer-willows in Nomansland, the stalkers that seed like plants and migrate like birds—how do they stand under the old classifications?

"I ask myself what am I?"

For a moment the morel was silent. His listeners looked at each other covertly, full of unease, until a flick of the Sodal's tail recalled them to the discourse.

"All of us here have by accident been swept aside from the main stream of devolution. We live in a world where each generation becomes less, and less defined. All life is tending towards the mindless, the infinitesimal: the embryonic speck. So will be fulfilled the processes of the universe. The universal fluxes will carry the spores of life to another and new system. Already you see the process at work, in these green pillars of light that draw life from the jungles. Under steadily increasing heat, devolutionary processes accelerate."

While the morel was speaking, its other half controlling the traverser had brought them steadily lower. Now they floated over dense jungle, over the mighty banyan that covered all of one sunlit

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continent. Warmth wrapped itself round them like a cloak.

Other traversers were here, moving their great bulks lightly up and down their threads. With hardly a jolt, morel's traverser alighted in the tips of the jungle.

Gren stood up at once, helping Yattmur to her feet.

"You are the wisest of creatures, morel. I feel no sorrow in leaving you, because you seem now so well able to look after yourself. Yattmur and I will speak of you when we are safe in the middle levels of the jungle. Are you coming also, Lily-yo, or is your life given over to riding vegetables?"

Lily-yo, Haris, and the others were also on their feet, facing Gren with a mixture of hostility and defensiveness he recognised from long ago.

"You're not leaving this splendid brain, this protector, this morel who is your friend?" Lily-yo asked.

Gren nodded.

"You are welcome to him—or he is welcome to you. You in your turn must decide as I have had to whether he is a power for good or evil. I have decided. I am taking Yattmur, Laren, and the two Arabler women back to the forest where I belong." When he snapped his fingers, the tattooed women rose obediently.

"Gren, you are as hard-headed as ever you were," Haris said, with a touch of ill-temper. "Come back to the True World with us—it's a better place than the jungle. You just heard the fish-morel say the jungle is doomed."

To his delight, Gren found he could use argument in a way that once would have been impossible to him.

"If what morel says is correct, Haris, then your other world is doomed as surely as this one."

The morel's voice came back, booming and irritable.

"So it is, man, but you have yet to hear about my plan. In the dim thought centre of this traverser I find awareness of worlds far beyond this, far beyond and basking round other suns. The traverser can be driven to make that journey. I and Lily-yo and the others will live inside it, safe, eating its flesh, until we get to those new worlds. We simply follow the green columns and ride on the fluxes of space and they will lead us to a good fresh place. Of course you must come with us, Gren."

"I'm tired of carrying or being carried. Go and good luck! Fill a whole empty world with people and fungus!"

"You know this Earth will suffer a fire death, you fool man!"

"So you said, O wise morel. You also said that that would not come for many generations. Laren and his son and his son's son will live in the green, rather than be corked into the gut of a vegetable making an unknown journey. Come

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along, Yattmur. Hup hey, you two women—come with me."

They moved to go. Ushering the tattooed women before her, Yattmur handed Laren to Gren, who rested him over his shoulder. Haris took a step forward with his knife out.

"You don't know what you're doing," he said.

"That may be true; but at least I know what you are doing."

Ignoring the man's blade, he climbed slowly down that vast shaggy flank. They lowered themselves until they could reach a slender bough, helping the submissive Arablers to gain a foothold. With a wonderful gladness in his heart, Gren looked down into the leafy depths of the forest.

"Come on," he said encouragingly. "This shall be home where danger was my cradle, and all we have learnt will guard us! Give me your hand, Yattmur."

Together they climbed down into a bower of leaves. They did not look back as the traverser with its passengers rose slowly, slowly climbed from the jungle up into the green-flecked sky.

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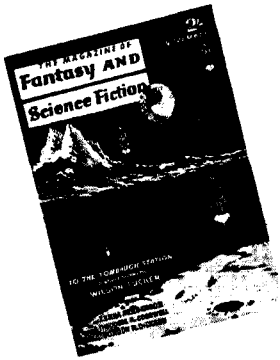

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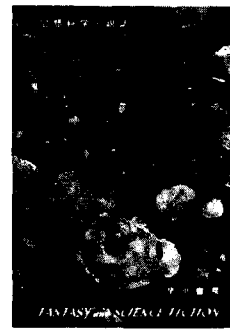

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